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KARL HEIM  
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# THE WORLD'S PERFECTER

*Jesus der Weltvollender*

THE ATONEMENT AND THE RENEWAL  
OF THE WORLD

*Translated by*  
D. H. VAN DAALEN

MUHLENBERG PRESS  
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This is a translation of the third German edition of *Jesus der Weltvollender: Der Glaube an die Versöhnung und Weltverwandlung*, published by Furche-Verlag, Hamburg, in 1952, Bd. III of *Der evangelische Glaube und das Denken der Gegenwart: Grundzüge einer christlichen Lebensanschauung*, by Professor Karl Heim of Tübingen University.

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The Kingdom of the world has become the  
Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and  
He shall reign for ever and ever.

Rev. xi.15

## PREFACE TO THE THIRD GERMAN EDITION

**T**HIS BOOK, which has been out of print for about nine years and is now published in a new edition, does not offer any new historical or theological discoveries which would be unknown to any serious reader of the Bible. But in the time of suffering and judgment through which our nation is now passing it has rendered a certain service, especially to those people who are at their wit's end about their own destiny and can no longer understand the destiny of this nation. This book drew their attention to the fact that God may have His reasons for restraining his almighty power until the hour of judgment and fulfilment for which the world is slowly maturing; that the question of guilt must be solved first, and that not until much later – at the very end – can the question of power find its divine solution. These ideas have particularly fallen in good soil wherever men have had time to think at leisure about their destiny, e.g. in prisoner of war camps. There this book has often been passed from hand to hand.

In its new edition may it continue to render the simple service which it has rendered so far.

I would here thank my friend Professor Dr Otto Schmitz for his assistance with the preparation of this new edition.

KARL HEIM

Tübingen, Spring 1952

## FROM THE PREFACE OF THE SECOND GERMAN EDITION

The main objection raised in many reviews by professional theologians against the whole manner in which the question concerning Christ is dealt with in this book, is that it is methodically not clear from what source the thoughts and beliefs here expressed have been taken; from Scripture and Confession, or from reason and experience. But it would be contrary to the aim of the book if, like a theological manual of doctrine, it had begun with *prolegomena* on the authority of Scripture and Confessions in order to deduce therefrom the individual points of belief. In practice most people nowadays are led to a living faith in Christ along a road in the opposite direction. The beginning is an experience which makes me have confidence in the authority of Christ to deliver me from my deepest distress. Only then do I realise that the New Testament, through which Christ speaks to me, has divine authority. Consequently in this book I do not begin with fundamental considerations concerning the sources of theological knowledge. I rather do it the way I would show someone the house in which he is to live. I do not start by showing him the architect's plans in order to explain the structure of the foundations on which the house rests. I begin by showing him the rooms. For the time being the foundations remain out of sight. Only after he has been living in the house for a while will he notice that it is built on firm foundations and stands up to the attacks of atmospheric conditions.

Therefore the – theologically – unmethodical form of the book has been retained in the new edition. I have made alterations and additions only where reviews and the comments of readers have drawn my attention to defects in the content.

May this book help to confirm the word of Scripture that in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 11.3).

KARL HEIM

Tübingen, July 1939



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PART ONE

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ATONEMENT  
AND THE PERFECTING OF THE WORLD

## CHAPTER 1

### *God and Guilt*

EVERYONE, whatever ideology he may adhere to, will admit that no one without any exception is in the condition in which we should be. It is easy in books and lectures to speak of the *Gottunmittelbarkeit*, the immediate relation to God, in which every man lives. But in real life we shall never meet anyone who would dare to say: "Nothing has ever come between God and me, I live by uninterrupted inspiration." We all admit that almost daily we get into painful situations in which we do not know what to do because we lack precisely that enlightenment which we should have if we were in continuous conversation with the Power that governs all things. We all admit that this is why we are also unable to bear without bitterness the very severe blows of fate and unjust ill-treatment. We all tremble before death even though for the look of the thing we may keep up a courageous attitude. If we were immediately in God then we should gladly welcome death as a feast. No one therefore denies seriously that between us and the *original*<sup>1</sup> Source of life there is something that prevents our immediate access to It, a cloud that darkens the clear sky.

The question therefore is: is this condition of being far from God a fate that we have to bear in courageous submission or are we in any way responsible for it? The preceding volume in this series<sup>2</sup> has made us realise that Christ reveals to us the truth which is bitter at first and which yet, once we have understood it, has a world-conquering power. Our farness from God is not a tragedy or a fate, it belongs to an entirely different category. It is our fault, it is guilt. We saw that this is, so to speak, the characteristic mark of Jesus' view of life;

<sup>1</sup> The German prefix *ur-*, for which there is no English equivalent but which is usually translated by *original*, will consistently be rendered *original* in italics except in some expressions as *die Urkirche*, the early Church. Cf. *Jesus the Lord*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Heim, *Jesus der Herr*, Engl. trans. *Jesus the Lord* by D. H. van Daalen, Edinburgh 1959 (figures in brackets refer to the English edition).



that the fundamental concept of the Greek tragedy of Fate, that is to say the merciless power of Fate which man fights, eventually to be defeated, is completely absent. According to Jesus there is no question of a will fighting a blind power of fate. On the contrary, a will is fighting an opposing will. What happens in the world is the great battle between the divine and the satanic will.

If we merely cast a glance at the development from the Old Testament via late Judaism to the view of Jesus, then we see that in the Old Testament (perhaps with the exception of 1 Chron. xxi.1) Satan is an officer in God's court, the counsel for the prosecution, in which capacity we see him in the prologue to the book of Job. Goethe refers to this in his *Faust*. In later Judaism Satan has developed into a power which attempts to frustrate God's plan of salvation. But not until the New Testament, under the influence of Jesus, does the final insight develop which can be summarised in a phrase which is unknown to late Judaism: Satan is the "god of this aeon", the "ruler of this world", who according to Lk. iv.6 has the power to give away all the kingdoms of this world. All men are under the sway of his rule as long as they have not been set free by an act of God. Consequently every rebellion against God has a satanic character. It has a total character and is an attempt of the hostile power to dethrone God and to seize His throne.

This is why the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to say reaches its climax in the supplication: "Deliver us from the evil one" (Mt. vi.13; R.S.V. note). Paul can summarise his mission by saying that he has the task "to open" men's "eyes, that they may turn . . . from the power of Satan to God" (Acts xxvi.18). God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. i.13). This anti-godly will lays claim on all that exists. Even the manner in which it is present corresponds to the manner in which the Spirit of God dwells within us. The satanic will is not a will that influences and entices us from without and for which therefore we can decline the responsibility. On the contrary it is one with our own innermost volition. Just as we ought to be not merely servants but children of God, so we can also be "children of the devil" (cf. 1 Jn. iii.10: "By this - that is to say by what they do - it may be seen who

are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil"; Jn. viii.44: "You are of your father the devil"). The disciple who by coaxing words attempts to tempt Jesus to save Himself is scolded by Jesus: "Get behind me, Satan" (Mk. viii.33). Jesus senses that Satan is speaking through the mouth of the disciple. When Judas' intention to betray Jesus comes to maturity it is said in the Gospel of Luke (xxii.3): "Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve." The same telling expression is found in Jn. xiii.27: "Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him." In Acts v.3 Peter says to Ananias: "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?"

Opposed to this New Testament view is the ancient Greek and Germanic creed which is fatalistic. The characteristic word there is not guilt but Fate. Each of the two views speaks of both guilt and fate, but the relationship between fate and guilt is entirely contrary. From the latter standpoint the dark power of fate which is over and above the individual will is the *original* source of all that happens. This fate entangles me in guilt. According to the other view it is the other way round. The ultimately decisive factor is an *original* sin and it is only on account of this guilt that I am entangled in a fate. The real depth of the divine-diabolical interpretation of life, as we find it with Christ and later again with Luther, as shown in *Jesus the Lord*<sup>3</sup> is to be found in the fact that two things must be said with equal emphasis without any attempt at reaching a rational harmony: "Satan is the god of this aeon," and "God works in all things, He works in Satan too." Thus the claims of God omnipotent are not interfered with. "From God Satan has received the power to work against God. In Rev. xiii it is said again and again: *καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ*. The Church's confidence in God is not shattered by the power of Satan."<sup>4</sup>

Consequently to the men of the Bible the sole agency of God is no argument against the reality of Satan. The choice between the two contradictory points of view depends on the simple question: is it really possible to get beyond this either-or – either guilt or fate? Can I feel responsible for something that

<sup>3</sup> pp. 115ff (104ff).

<sup>4</sup> Werner Foerster in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Stuttgart 1932-, vol. II, p. 80.



is not within reach of my own decision, something that I have done or suffered under the impact of a fate?<sup>5</sup> Does my conscience really condemn me for something that I was bound to do<sup>6</sup> and that therefore belonged to my fate just as much as if I die of a disease contracted through my medical practice, or if I am buried under an avalanche which has taken me by surprise?

To this we must reply that as soon as the either-or of guilt and destiny is obliterated, as soon as we blur the sharp dividing line between responsible action and suffering for which we are not responsible, we shake the foundations upon which the order of our life together as a community and a state is built, and particularly the foundations of criminal law. In arriving at a verdict and meting out punishment the all-important question at all times is: can the accused be held responsible for what he is accused of? Or did maybe an insane passion lead him to his action so that he did not know what he was doing? For example, is the court dealing with premeditated murder or has the accused in jealousy and blind rage killed his wife's seducer whom he caught red-handed? In every case of suicide we ask: was it committed with a clear mind in full responsibility or did the person concerned throw himself out of the window while in a state of mental darkness? The whole moral seriousness with which a father appeals to his little boy who has deceived him, or an officer punishes a soldier who has been sleeping on duty, is weakened and shattered as soon as guilt and fate are blended, as soon as that of which my conscience declares me guilty and that which is "a necessity of cosmic law" are so mixed up that a clear distinction between them can no longer be made. It sounds very profound to speak of the fatality of guilt so long as we look at the thing from the point of view of a spectator. But it becomes dangerous if I allow this thought to influence me at a critical moment of my ethical development, e.g. when I am tempted to lose my manly discipline over my natural instincts and allow myself to be fettered by the seductive siren song of unclean pleasures. In this situation it has the effect of sweet poison if someone tells me: "There is no growth without guilt. That is why guilt is man's destiny. That is why, if we see its

<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Hauer, *Deutsche Gottschau*, Stuttgart 1935, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 136.



deepest connexions, guilt is God's decision."<sup>7</sup> "The epic songs of the Edda . . . are saturated with the tremendous sensation that the hero who goes the way he ought to go becomes guilty."<sup>8</sup> If a man in moral danger is told this then it paralyses him if, for example, he is tempted to be unfaithful to his wife. It soothes the mind of the potentate who calmly walks over dead bodies in order to secure his throne. For he says to himself: "I must fulfil my destiny, for there is no growth without guilt. That is the way in which God has made the world. Why should I not follow the cosmic necessity that leads to light only through the night?"

These practical consequences of any mixing up of guilt and destiny show us more than anything else that as soon as the attempt is made to overcome the either-or and to build a bridge across the abyss that separates guilt and fate, what comes into being is not a mysterious high tension between the statement "I fulfil my inevitable destiny", and the other statement "I accept the responsibility for my action." The result is that fate becomes the all-governing power and the category of the ethical is swallowed up by destiny. This does not prevent the use of the word guilt. But what is called guilt here is guilt no longer. It no longer has the inexorable seriousness of a violation of the categorical imperative.

Whether by the word guilt someone really does mean guilt or merely a tragic fate, is not necessarily shown by the strong emphasis he puts on the word. One can see it only by the manner in which he seeks to dispose of the guilt. We have been told that a real man and a real woman should "acknowledge their guilt", but "not in order to be afraid and weep, and to invoke a redeemer, but in order that by courageous action we should allow it to mature, or, if need be, in order to perish by it outwardly so as to be saved inwardly. This is how men and women become capable of overcoming guilt and entering into fresh action."<sup>9</sup> Someone who speaks like this has as yet no idea of the depth of guilt. A tragic fate like war-blindness can, it is true, mature into courageous action by making me achieve, in spite of my handicap, the utmost that a man can achieve under the circumstances. In this sense I can overcome a shattering fate and "enter into fresh action". For example,

<sup>7</sup> Hauer, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>9</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 142f.

when I have barely recovered from a serious wound I can volunteer again for military service in order to dedicate the remainder of my strength to my country. But with guilt it is an entirely different case. I can never draw strength from guilt but only weakness. The guilty act as such, e.g. a lie or adultery, sets back my development, dishonours me and takes away my manly dignity. If "I want to acknowledge my guilt" as a "real man" then this can only mean that, like Luther, I abide by the terrible accusation to which my guilt exposes me, refrain from excusing myself or making any attempt to glorify my guilt as a tragic fate, and radically break with what made me guilty. This is what Eckhart means when he speaks of the blessedness of guilt. This blessedness is certainly not attached to the anti-godly act itself but to its negation. It arises from radically breaking with sin, from penitently "turning away" from sin. By this I am "made small and humbled" to such an extent that "with an unshakeable will" I "arm myself against every sin". In this way I arrive at "penitence before God", and in this deep penitence and remorse I then experience the wonderful fact that even through the fall and the ensuing misery God wants to tie me more closely to Himself. This is not merely an idea of Eckhart's but an experience which many other Christians have expressed as well.

It was by no means a correct statement of the historical facts when we were told that the ancient Nordic fatalistic creed alone was in keeping with the Germanic attitude of mind and that any consciousness of guilt divorced from fate is a foreign sense of inferiority which has crept into Germany's spiritual life from without. On the contrary two fundamentally contrasting views have always been found in the Aryan world.

One view is found in the Indian belief in *karma*, in Greek tragedy, in the *Edda* and in part still in Goethe. According to this the final authority which determines all things is an inevitable fate. This fate is what makes us guilty. The other line runs from the religion of conscience of the German Reformers to Kant's doctrine of *das radikal Böse*, the radically evil (that which is radically evil) and from there to Schelling's philosophy of revelation. According to this the ultimately decisive factor on which everything depends is not a fate but an *original sin* in which we participate, and this guilt is the origin of all the



tragic destinies under which we suffer. The unclarified confusion between guilt and fate is so attractive to us because it meets a need of our heart. As soon as our conscience accuses us of something, we want to put the responsibility for our action on something that exculpates us and provides us with extenuating circumstances. We would fain make the water turbid so as to make ourselves invisible to him who pursues us. Kant therefore used his whole philosophical intelligence to arrive at a pure definition of the category of the ethical and thereby at the essence of guilt, in the same way as a scientist may devote his whole life to arriving at a pure form of a newly discovered element that so far has been known only in various compounds. According to Kant's conviction the majesty of "*Pflicht*", of duty or moral obligation, can have an irresistible power over the conscience of even the simplest man only if the ethical, the iron obligation (*Bindung*) under which we stand, the incorruptible court before which we have to answer for ourselves, is kept free of any entanglement with all that comes over us merely as the power of fate. This ultimate obligation must be clearly distinguished from all that merely belongs to our constitution, to the fact that we are human, that is to say from our talents and the inherited make-up of our temperament. Consequently Kant radically declines to deduce our guilt, e.g. from our fate that we are not merely rational but also sensual beings, made up of spirit and nature, reason and senses. Whatever belongs to my make-up can for that very reason not be attributed to me as guilt. On the contrary it serves to exculpate me. This leads Kant to the conclusion which we find with Schelling as well: the fact that there is guilt in the world can in no way be attributed to any constellation of power or to immanent relations. It is due to a simply inexcusable, inexplicable, baseless decision, an "intelligible act" which is prior to any experience and by which the intelligible ego has decided to give priority to the sensual instincts over the commandment of reason. Kant's doctrine of the radically evil is merely a philosophical description of what Jesus calls the satanic, an inevitable conclusion from a pure understanding of the category of the ethical.

Schiller, it is true, found Kant's doctrine of the radically evil "appalling". He writes to Goethe: "There is still something

about him which, like Luther, reminds one of the monk who has found his way out of the monastery but cannot destroy the traces of it."<sup>10</sup> It repelled him that evil should have its ground not in sensuous nature but in human personality as the seat of liberty. Schiller refused to give up the thought that the essence of man is good and that evil is only an outward veneer which one need only peel off in order to show up the pure *original* image in its own light.

But even in a work as early as *Die Räuber*,<sup>11</sup> when Karl Moor's conscience awakes, the clear insight breaks through that guilt must not be attributed to any extra-personal or supra-natural origin. On the contrary guilt is an incomprehensible, inexcusable, anti-godly, evil will of our own. Remember the shattering complaint about the lost paradise of innocence in that drama, in the scene by the Danube:

"Yes, friends, this world is very lovely" . . . "This earth so glorious!" . . . (sinking back) "And I so hideous in this lovely world – a monster on this glorious earth". . . "My innocence! give me back my innocence! Behold, every living thing is gone forth to bask in the cheering rays of the vernal sun – why must I alone inhale the torments of hell out of the joys of heaven? . . . The whole world *one* family, and one Father above – but He not *my* Father. I alone the outcast, I alone rejected from the ranks of the blessed, . . . riveted to vice with iron fetters. . ."

The most significant document, however, for the confession of guilt is the opening scene of the final act, the dialogue of Franz Moor with the faithful servant Daniel, in which eventually Moser, the minister, comes on to the stage. Here materialism desperately defends itself against the awakening conscience and the Reality of God which speaks by the voice of conscience: "Vulgar prejudice! mere superstition! It has not yet been proved that the past is not past and forgotten, or that there is an eye above this earth to take account of what passes on it. – Humph! humph! But whence, then, this fearful whisper to my soul? Is there really an avenging judge above the stars? – No, no! – Yes, yes! A fearful monitor within bears witness that

<sup>10</sup> *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe from 1794 to 1805*, trans. L. Dora Schmitz, London 1879, VOL. II, No. 559 (p. 182).

<sup>11</sup> J. Ch. Fr. von Schiller, *Die Räuber*. The quotations are from Henri G. Bohn's translation *The Robbers*, London 1848, Act III, sc. ii and Act V, sc. i.



there is One above the stars who judgeth! – What! meet the avenger above the stars this very night? No, no! I say. – All is empty, lonely, desolate, beyond the stars. – Miserable subterfuge beneath which thy cowardice seeks to hide itself – And if there should be something in it after all? No! no! it cannot be. I insist that it cannot be! But yet, if there should be! – Woe to thee, if thy sins should all have been registered above! If they should be counted over thee this very night! – Why creeps this shudder through my frame? – To *die*! – Why does that word fright me thus? – To give an account to the Avenger, there, above the stars! – and if he should be just – the wail of orphans and widows, of the oppressed, the tormented, ascending to his ears, and he be just? – Why have they been afflicted? And why have I been permitted to trample upon them?” – To his materialistic and atheistic objections Moser replies: “So says the philosophy of your despair. But your own heart, which knocks against your ribs with terror even while you thus argue, gives your tongue the lie. These cobwebs of systems are swept away by the single word – ‘*Thou must die*’ – I challenge you, and be this the test: – if you maintain your firmness in the hour of death; if your principles do not then miserably desert you, you shall be admitted to have the best of the argument. But if, in that dread hour the least shudder creeps over you, then woe be to you! You have deceived yourself.”

Schopenhauer in this point takes the same route as Schiller in his early period. In his opinion the Old Testament story of the fall is not a Jewish dishonouring of man, which we should reject from the point of view of the heroic ideal of Germanic man. He says on the contrary: “The myth of the fall (though probably, as all Judaism, derived from the *Zend-Avesta*: *Bundahish* 15) is the only part of the Old Testament of which I can admit any metaphysical, though merely allegorical truth; this is the only thing that reconciles me with the Old Testament.” Denial of the doctrine of *original* sin is according to Schopenhauer not a return to the Nordic ideal of honour and freedom, but superficial French optimism. “The fundamental characteristic and the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* (first lie) of Rousseau’s whole philosophy is this, that for the Christian doctrine of *original* sin, of the *original* badness of the human race, he substitutes an original good and unlimited perfectibility of the same, which has gone

wrong merely on account of civilisation and its consequences, and on this he builds his optimism and humanism."<sup>12</sup>

Finally, as an example from the present time, a reminder of the serious thoughts which Ernst Wiechert expresses when he looks back to the darkest day of his life, when he became guilty by breaking faith with the girl of his first love:

"Is the harvest the decisive thing about a life? Does the result justify all the hardness we need in order to shape our work so as we desire to leave it? Or does the tear which was shed for our sake weigh heavier in the balance of Judgment than all the world's works of art? I still do not know. But there is a creeping terror about the first bare sin of which we became guilty. This is not mere shame. Shame makes us blush and may well be a wholesome motion of the blood. But terror lives in a deeper darkness. It grips not only the individual but our whole generation, indeed it gradually attacks the law of all life. For if all human work is connected with guilt then blushing is not sufficient. A treacherous tremor moves the ground on which we stand and there is nothing left to us but either to throw ourselves into God's arms or to fix the helmet more securely by which we fancy we shall withstand death."<sup>13</sup>

All this shows that there have always been two conflicting persuasions in German spiritual life; the attempt to take away the sting from guilt and to alter it into a tragic fate in which we have got caught on account of our human constitution, our sensuous inclinations or the history of our people, and the awakening of a pure consciousness of guilt which in emphatic self-accusation refuses all exculpation and any confusion with ethically neutral powers. Schiller especially, a most typically German mind, was moved in the very depth of his creative work by the struggle between these two currents.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, 1819, VOL. II, BK. IV, ch. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Wiechert, *Wälder und Menschen*, Munich 1936, pp. 210ff.



## CHAPTER 2

### *Guilt and Fate*

**B**EFORE WE SPEAK of the Gospel it is necessary that we should clearly realise the contrast between guilt and fate. We shall describe the salient points one by one:

1. Fate, e.g. an illness, a shipwreck, an earthquake, an avalanche, is always something that I can comprehend as a link in a vast chain of cause and effect. It belongs to the essence of guilt that I cannot comprehend it in these terms. If my conscience accuses me of a transgression, e.g. a cowardly escape at a moment of supreme responsibility, or unconcern for a brother who has fallen a victim to robbers, then to me, who am guilty, this action is something ultimately inexplicable,<sup>1</sup> something that I cannot deduce from any cause so as to explain and thereby to excuse it. Someone else who is not the doer but merely the eye-witness of my action may explain it psychologically by my character or a hereditary predisposition, or historically by the environment in which I have grown up or fatalistically by the great causal connexions which made the deed inevitable. But I myself cannot do this. At the moment when my conscience acts any such explanation is prohibited. For my conscience tells me with incorruptible clarity: You are guilty, you alone. Indeed we have to express this even more clearly so that the contrast between guilt and fate may be shown up sufficiently sharply. My conscience tells me: By the very attempt you make to put the blame on to something else, e.g. to explain it by your destiny, you incur additional guilt. You are adding a heavier debt to the balance of your guilt than was already there. You are treasuring up guilt for the day of judgment if you search for an explanation instead of confessing without further ado: "Father, I have sinned."

2. The second contrast arises from the question what we can do to overcome guilt and fate. I can meet my fate with the

<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, *Theologische Aufsätze*, Gütersloh 1928, VOL. II, p. 146.

power of my will. As a German I can courageously struggle against the fate that Germany is a nation without space.<sup>2</sup> Maybe fate is stronger than my will, nevertheless I can meet it with all my strength. But with guilt it is a different case. The terrible thing about a guilty deed is that it cannot be undone in all eternity. Here all my heroism is powerless. By that inexplicable act for which I alone am responsible I have fallen into a trap from which I cannot free myself. I may rattle my chains as much as I like, but I am trapped in my guilt. It is true what Schiller makes Karl Moor say in Act V of *Die Räuber*: "The souls of those I have strangled in the intoxication of love – of those whom I crushed to atoms in the sacredness of sleep – of those whom – Ha! ha! ha! do you hear the powder-magazine bursting over the heads of women in travail? – Do you see the flames creeping round the cradles of sucklings? That is our nuptial torch; those shrieks our wedding-music! – Oh! he forgetteth none of these things! he knoweth how to connect the links. . . . This is retribution."

"It is past! – I would arise, and return to my father, but heaven has said 'It shall not be!' Blind fool that I was! why should I wish it? Is it possible for a great sinner to return? A great sinner never can return. – That ought I long since to have known. – . . . When He sought me, I would not; now that I seek Him, He will not. What can be more just? – . . ."

Whatever it may be, a hurtful word that has escaped me, a dirty thought which arose from my soul, guilt is always like a prison cell which I can certainly open from the outside as long as I am still free and have the key. But as soon as I am inside and the door is locked, I am a prisoner who cannot escape. The deed that has been done is no longer at my choice. I am the prisoner of my deed. No power on earth and no heroic effort can take away the guilt which I have incurred. "What shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Mt. xvi.26; "his life", R.S.V.).

3. The third contrast between guilt and fate is connected with this. It concerns the weight, the *pondus peccati* of which Anselm spoke, the intensive and extensive essential power which guilt has as contrasted with fate. Schiller says: "*Der Uebel*

<sup>2</sup> The English reader should remember that this lack of *Lebensraum*, space to live, is very real to the mind of the German nation. Tr.



*grösstes ist die Schuld* (the greatest evil of all is guilt)."<sup>3</sup> Guilt alone is the absolute evil, the absolutely terrible and unbearable, the simply irrevocable loss. Compared to guilt all else that may be terrible in the world is very slight indeed. If one weighs guilt against all other suffering in the world, unhappy love which makes life a hell, life-long hard labour in the mines of Siberia, continuous suffering from cancer without any hope but the prospect of a painful death, softening of the brain leading to madness, epilepsy with increasing stupefaction – the guilt will easily outweigh all the other evils in the scale. And if on the other hand we think of all that the world offers by way of good things, then all the riches, power and happiness of the world cannot balance and replace the damage caused by one guilty act. "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and damages his soul?" (Mt. xvi.26; "forfeits his life", R.S.V.). If I gather all the treasures of the world in my hand, if I get everything that I could desire, political influence, an invincible military force obedient to my command, if I am admired and feared by the whole world, and I have one guilt on my conscience, then I am a miserable man, a poor beggar in the midst of all the splendour of world dominion. Luther says, "Conscience is a far greater thing than heaven and earth. If it did not exist, hell would have no fire or even pain. But this untamed creature lights and strengthens death and hell and arms the whole creation against us." "Consequently hell will be nothing other than a bad conscience. If the devil did not have a bad conscience, he would be in heaven. But a bad conscience lights the fire of hell and causes inwardly in the heart the terrible pain and the infernal work of the devil."

To summarise the three conclusions to which we have been led, we have demonstrated in three decisive points the peculiar character of guilt as compared to all that we may call fate.

In the first place we have seen that guilt is an inexplicable *original* act to which I always add fresh guilt if I attempt to deduce it from something else.

Secondly, by this inexplicable and therefore inexcusable act I land in a trap from which I cannot extricate myself and from which no power on earth can extricate me. By completely

<sup>3</sup> J. Ch. Fr. von Schiller, *Die Braut von Messina*, last line.

free choice I have imprisoned myself. "Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (Jn. viii.34).

Thirdly, this imprisonment which is my own fault is an absolute evil compared to which even the worst vicissitudes of fate are light. It is the destruction of an absolute, incomparable good compared to which any loss that may be due to fate, even the loss of all our influence and our life, is insignificant.

What is the deepest ground of these three characteristics by which guilt is distinguished from fate? They have only one ground and can be understood only on one assumption. They all come into effect because every form of guilt, whatever it may consist of, is never guilt before men or before some reality of this world but a rebellion aimed immediately at God.

I have, it is true, become guilty in respect of my brother, of my wife and child, of my nation and country. But these transgressions become guilty only because these earthly realities are not the ultimate object but merely stations on the road of the progress of sin. The latter has a further aim. It is eventually aimed at Him who has ordained all things and to whom consequently the whole world belongs. If we neglect the child that God has entrusted to us, or refuse to take responsibility for the nation within which God has placed us, then we transgress against God's property. This is why one of the prayers of confession in the Old Testament says: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned" (Ps. li.4). And the prodigal son in the parable describes his guilt by saying: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Lk. xv.21). The son certainly has sinned against his father. He has broken his father's heart. But sin was done "against heaven"; the final aim was God. The object of sin, it is true, is always a value within this world. I become guilty in respect of this value if I destroy or neglect it. But the immanent value is not the ultimate objective of the sinful movement. This rather transcends the immediate value, as one looks through something transparent at the light that is behind it and shines through it.

If the guilt which we incur is always guilt against God, then every deed which we do leaves two kinds of traces on two different levels. One trace can be found on the level of the polar world. It consists of the thousand effects and results in this world which follow from my deed. They are like the



circular undulations caused by a stone thrown into the water or like the waves of sound in the air caused by a note. These effects may be quite small so that they are hardly noticed, like the traces which my footsteps leave in the sand and which are wiped out by the wind in no time. Among average people a great-grandson does not even know the name of his great-grandfather. But the traces which a word or a deed leaves behind can also change the face of a whole continent for thousands of years. There are people who can say of themselves like Goethe's Faust: "The traces of my days cannot be wiped out in thousands of years." After many thousands of years the ruins of ancient monuments still rise above the sand as silent witnesses to colossal events. But all those traces left by a deed on the level of the polar world, whether they remain visible only for seconds or continue for thousands of years, can be wiped out and will eventually be wiped out. The detonation caused by a heavy explosion may disturb the air in a circle of hundreds of miles. But somewhere in the universe there is an end of even the last and most remote movements caused by it, and the sound is swallowed up by the silence of infinity. This holds good of all the effects produced by our actions on the objective level of this world.

At the same time every step we take leaves a second trace. This is on another level. This is the change taking place in the *original* relation between every creature and the Creator. I can on account of a deed get closer to God or be further estranged from Him. This deed can open up or cloud for me the light of the eternal world. All that I say or do is registered in the memory of eternity. Figuratively speaking, it is entered in God's books which will be opened at the judgment. The film of my life can be shown once more, when all of us with all that we have done will become manifest before God's judgment seat. This second trace of what we do is invisible "before the world", that is to say on the objective level. It remains concealed from the spectator and the historian but is visible to the one who acts. In the solitude of his conscience this is a terrible reality which under circumstances can lead to despair and insanity. This second effect of what we do is judged by quite different standards from the first. Jesus demonstrated this to His disciples by the widow's mite. A sacrifice which no one

has noticed, an event which is of no consequence to the world, which is not mentioned in the press, which indeed may be regarded as a complete mistake as far as the world is concerned, may shine with glory in the memory of eternity if it represents full surrender to God. It may be entered with shining letters in God's books which will be opened at the judgment. On the other hand the deed by which a hero has entered his name in the books of history for all time may be completely valueless when weighed on the scales of eternity. The decisive distinction between any effects which belong to the realm of power and fate and this second effect which belongs to the realm of the *original* relation is this: any effects of power exercised within this world, whether they are great or small, leave traces which can be erased. But the trace left by the second effect is indelible.

We can understand the three characteristics by which guilt is fundamentally distinguished from fate only if the Biblical view of the ultimate objective of guilt is correct.

In the first place the inexplicability and inexcusability of guilt. If another man or some other created being makes a demand on me which I cannot fulfil, then I can excuse myself by saying: I am a weak man, I cannot fulfil the demand, I lack the time and the strength. But when God demands then this command is backed by the will of the Creator whose infinite strength is omnipresent and works in all things. Consequently if I obey His will I have omnipotent power on my side. God's power is stronger than my cowardice, my shyness, my nervousness, my will's weakness on account of heavy burdens of heredity and many past defeats. The power behind God's command is therefore *a priori* superior to anything that might stop me from fulfilling it at once, "willingly, gladly and with pleasure". I can therefore in any situation say to God, just like Augustine, "*Da, quod iubes, et iube, quod vis* (Give what thou commandest and command what thou desirest)." If I do not do this but stubbornly close myself to God in order to live for myself, then there can be no excuse. It is an unfounded, inexplicable *original* decision of a creature against the Creator.

If God alone is the objective at which every sin is aimed then this explains the second characteristic which guilt always has.



I am completely powerless and condemned to pure passivity in respect of the guilt once it has been incurred. If something happens to me as a blow of fate or as an effect of power, then I can meet it with active resistance. I can enter into battle and at least attempt to gain some ground. But when my conscience pronounces me guilty of a deed that has been done, say a lie or a perjury, then any resistance to this judge is in vain. I cannot alter or influence his verdict. Here and only here is an heroic man in exactly the same position as a coward. Before this seat of judgment we have, according to the New Testament, nothing more to say, but can only "receive" our judgment (II Cor. v.10). Before the eternal judgment every mouth without discrimination is "stopped" (*ἵνα πάν στόμα φραγῇ*, Rom. III.19). There is no room for contradiction here. For the guilt of which we are convicted is aimed against Him who is outside the arena in which resistance can be made at all. By all the means which we employ within this world in the strife for power and influence we cannot reach Him who is transcendent and inescapable. Any arms for use in this battle have been taken from us.

If my responsibility to a man or even to the nation demands my life, it is possible for me in some way or other to escape. "*Patet exitus*" quoth the Stoic philosopher: I can leave this life. I can throw myself into the night of death. There is the place where no human claim can follow me any longer. There I am safe from it as in an unassailable fortress. Only the responsibility which I have before God I cannot escape in death. "If I say, 'Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night', even the darkness is not dark to thee" (Ps. cxxxix.10). God is the only One before whom there is no place of escape. I cannot even escape from Him when I die. Even in death I continue to fall into His hands.

If guilt is always directed against God, then this also explains the third characteristic which distinguishes guilt from fate. This, as we saw, is that guilt is "the greatest evil of all", the only absolute evil, compared to which any blows of fate can cause only relative damage. This is because communion with God is the only true Good, the "highest Good of all goods" (Gerhard Tersteegen), that infinitely surpasses all that the world can give of happiness and glory and riches. Guilt how-

ever robs me of communion with God. I thereby lose the only true Good that cannot be replaced by any earthly good. Through the accusation of my conscience the heavens are clouded above me. God becomes inaccessible. He is no longer mine. He recedes to infinite remoteness. But if God is against me, then, as Luther says, all His creatures turn against me as well. An icy hand presses on my heart. A deep loneliness comes upon me, and a limitless sense of belonging nowhere, which is more terrible than any abandonment by men and which cannot be made good by the most wonderful experience of human comradeship. This is the terror of which Ernst Wiechert says that it is connected with the first bare guilt which we committed and that it lives in a deeper darkness than the shame which makes us blush. This leads the poet to the question whether every tear that is wept for our sake does not weigh more heavily in the judgment than all the works of art on earth.<sup>4</sup>

This appreciation of guilt, it is true, is contrary to the appreciation of values which is usual in the world. We have all been blinded and overawed by the display of splendour by which the power and wealth of the world intoxicate our senses to such an extent that it seems almost laughable to think that something so secret as the hidden guilt that weighs on someone's conscience, or the disturbed fellowship with God which objectively is not apparent at all, could in any way compete with the irresistible forces which are active in heavy artillery and battle cruisers, in blast furnaces and world-wide industrial combines. That is why Jesus uses the strongest possible means to impress, indeed to force upon us the hard truth that the damage caused by the least guilt before God cannot be undone by all the power and all the gold of the whole earth. Jesus speaks about this very expressively in the sermon on causes of stumbling (Mk. ix.42-50), which makes an indelible impression on everyone who hears it on account of its great vividness and the three times repeated refrain of the worm that does not die and the fire that is not extinguished. It is much better, says the Lord, for us to become one-eyed cripples, that is to say to put ourselves in a position in which we are robbed of every means of existence, in which we can no longer take any job

<sup>4</sup> Wiechert, *Wälder und Menschen*, p. 211.



and have to beg in the streets with our barrel-organ, than that we should allow ourselves to be tempted to one sin. For sin destroys our communion with God and delivers us to the flames of eternal wrath. In this sermon Jesus gives us an advice that from a merely educational point of view is very dangerous and which at all times has induced deranged people to attempt suicide. But the aim He has in view is so important that He is prepared to take the risk. He says we should cut off our hand, saw off our foot, pluck out our eye, that is to say we should destroy the most vital organs which according to the normal order of creation are entitled to the most careful consideration and treatment, if we can thereby avoid temptation to only one sin. Guilt therefore is something so terrible and has such a weight to pull us down that the surrender of all earthly opportunities of life and work is not too high a price and sacrifice if this makes it possible for us to deny only one sin the entry to our heart. If Jesus is right, if guilt really does weigh as heavily as that, then the actions of thousands of men and women in times of religious persecution become comprehensible. They gave up freedom, power and happiness for their whole lives in order that they might retain a clear conscience. The Huguenots who did not recant their faith during the persecution under Louis XIV were sent to the galleys. For the rest of their lives they were put in chains to work as oar-slaves up to twenty hours a day until they fell ill and died of exhaustion. They preferred being banished to a hell for their life-time to living in liberty and power, in happiness and security with a guilt on their conscience. This can be understood only if it is true that no earthly good is so precious that it should not be sacrificed with pleasure if it is a matter of keeping ourselves clear from a guilty deed.

Summarising what we have said so far about the essence of guilt as distinguished from fate, all this is merely the unfolding of the fundamental insight to which Jesus leads us when He attributes all the sin of the world and all the resistance with which He meets in His mission to a satanic will which rebels against the Creator. For a rebellion which in every respect is immediately directed against God and His reign, and which is without any foundation because it cannot be explained or excused either on account of weakness of will or because of lack



of insight, that is a satanic rebellion. For we already saw in *Jesus the Lord* that this inexplicable hatred of God cannot be a limited, immanent power. The satanic meets God in His own sphere on the supra-polar level. It desires "to be like God" and to dethrone God.<sup>5</sup> If therefore there breaks out in us, e.g. a blind rage against one of our fellow-men, or envy and jealousy towards a successful competitor, or some other inclination which poisons our soul, then these volcanic eruptions are not decisions, taken at that particular moment. They are discharges of a power which potentially is already there but which at this particular moment is set in motion through certain external, perhaps completely trivial causes, in the same way as the gravitation by which a newly built ship glides down into its watery element is allowed to act by a seaman cutting the rope that so far held the ship, or as pushing a button makes the contact that puts electric current in motion. The cutting of the rope or the pushing of the button is not the actual cause of what happens. Those are comparatively small reasons as compared to the real effective cause, which is contained in the weight of the ship and in the latent electric tension. The latent power which is discharged in widely various forms according to varying circumstances is the hatred of God of this satanic power that wills in us. This is the actual guilt in the guilt. That is why again and again we are shocked at the abysses of our heart when quite unexpectedly at an external impulse thoroughly dirty sadistic inclinations break forth from us, of which we had never thought ourselves capable. Therefore, according to the Sermon on the Mount, it makes no real difference before God, whether the result is just an inadmissible word of abuse, or murder (Mt. v.21-2); whether I allow myself to be seduced to adultery or whether it does not get any further than a covetous look, i.e. "adultery in the heart" (Mt. v.27-8). If we look at things from a human point of view, if we take the point of view of a human court of justice, or if we think of the consequences for civil life within the worldly relationships in which we live, then it makes a tremendous difference whether we stopped at an unclean inclination of our heart or whether we did the criminal deed which destroyed a family life. But to God this distinction is ultimately irrelevant. In God's sight

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 103ff (93ff).

these are merely various expressions, conditioned by character and circumstances, of the one great satanic movement which in creation is directed against the Creator.



### CHAPTER 3

#### *The Question of Guilt and Power*

THE WHOLE ARGUMENT so far has been aimed at demonstrating as clearly as possible, in contrast to a philosophy which regards guilt as fate, the incomparable unique character of the category of the ethical and of moral responsibility, and at distinguishing it as clearly as possible from anything for which we have no responsibility, which is there and happens to us independently of our responsible decision. In our argument so far we have called this other thing from which we distinguish guilt, fate or destiny. The question which is here at issue may perhaps become even clearer if we substitute a simpler word: "power". That which happens to me as my fate is always a power which in most cases is stronger than my will. Fate has been compared to the surf that lifts the fragile boat of human existence and throws it down again, or a storm that disturbs the sea. In Goethe's words: "Life of man, thou art like water; fate of man, thou art like the wind!" It may happen that my destiny does not carry me away like a wave nor plays with me like the wind, but that I am able to master it. But this cannot be effected by a simple decision of my will: power is needed. I must be able to meet the power of fate with another power, e.g. a body that is able to offer resistance so that it can overcome illness, or a sharp intellect that can find a way out of a desperate situation. For the question of fate therefore we can substitute the question of power. If we do this we realise at once that the word "power" has an extraordinarily rich and manifold meaning. In fact this word contains all those things for which we fight and care and work as long as we live, except guilt and its solution. We shall here discuss only the most relevant phenomena expressive of power.

The first expression of power is corporeality, the form which the will creates within the objective world. According to the dynamic understanding of the world represented in Vol. I of

this work, the will too belongs to the *coming-to-be* of the world which precedes the *having-become*, i.e. to the state of transition which changes into the state of paralysis as soon as the desire has taken shape in the space of objectivity. All volition therefore is a struggle for the corporal realisation of the willed object. Power is conquest of visibility, victorious battle against all other things which desire to become visible and tangible. That which has no power cannot attain to objective realisation. It disappears from the scene. For power therefore we can also substitute the inexhaustible word "life". Life is superabundant and continuous development of power. It is the maintenance and procreation of a defined form. Impotence is the repression of this development of life. The decay of the living form, the complete collapse is death.

The second form of expression of power is pleasure as contrasted to suffering and pain. Every victory of vital energy over all that restrains life causes pleasure. Pain is the emotional expression of the as yet undecided struggle of the living organism against the powers which want to destroy its life. By the physical pain of a smarting wound our nerves inform us about the battle that is taking place at the wounded spot between the blood-corpuscles and the dangerous morbidic agents which attempt to enter our blood at this unfortified point. And the same applies in a figurative sense to mental pain. A defeat in this struggle for power which life has to fight against invading death causes desperate suffering.

A third form in which power expresses itself is knowledge, the exploring, thinking and understanding searching of the world in which we find ourselves. Thinkingly and searchingly we want to acquire power over Reality. For "knowledge is power." The mathematical formula by which we are able to express a fundamental law of what happens in the physical world, is a magic wand by which we fancy we have power over what happens in the world. A philosophical system, like Hegel's for example, is a titanic effort of the human mind, to have sovereign dominion over Reality. Conversely we become painfully conscious of our impotence, whenever we are faced with an irrational fact that offers stubborn resistance to any attempt to subject it to our reflexion.

A fourth form of expression of power is beauty. Aestheticists



have given very varied definitions of the essence of beauty and maybe it is not possible for us to define the beautiful at all. But one thing we certainly can say: wherever a will has effortless sway over form, there beauty comes into being, whether it be a flower growing from its native soil, where the mysterious formative will that is active in it can fully develop, or whether it be a medieval castle in the midst of a "maternal landscape", a thoroughbred horse or a young human body that is "in shape", effortless violin-playing or a masterpiece like the Sistine Madonna, the Parthenon frieze with the noble Greek proportions of all its forms or the national costumes and dances which the soul of an unspoiled nation creates in an unconscious sense of beauty. In all these cases beauty came into being because an unconscious forming will had the power freely to take shape as an objective creation. Certainly even a wounded or dying organism can be beautiful. A connoisseur of Alpine flora once pointed to the beauty of the storm-fir which, with broken-off branches, clings to the bank and resists the storms. But the beauty of the badly wounded warrior lies in the fact that even in this most difficult situation he tenaciously clings to his forming will. It is this characteristic form that still shines as hidden beauty from his figure bent by the storm. Something ugly comes into being only when this power to reach a characteristic form is lacking. "Lack of form is always a sign of the impotence of inner life."<sup>1</sup> The ugly deformation of creation takes place when a forming will no longer has the power to maintain itself against alien powers which want to frustrate the development of its characteristic form, that is to say, for example, when a human body is inflated through wrong nourishment or wasted away by tuberculosis, or when an art born from the soul of a nation succumbs to foreign influences and deteriorates into trash and bad taste.

In saying all this we have only accentuated the most important aspects and forms of expression of the rich content of the word "power". We have seen that the words "power" and "impotence" contain all that in daily life preoccupies and agitates us, riches and poverty, public appreciation or insignificance, life or death, happiness and pain, knowledge and ignorance, beauty and ugliness. In all this the question of

<sup>1</sup> Frizo Melzer, *Die Kunst in der neueren Theologie*, Tübingen 1935, p. 40.

power is at stake. One question only is beyond all those concerns which fill our daily life. This one question confronts all those concerns in complete isolation. It is the question which alone is important and which pushes aside all other questions: Am I undefiled before God? Can I pass examination before Him? Or am I burdened with guilt?

If we contrast the two central questions around which human thought and anxiety has circled at all times as around the two poles of an ellipse – on the one hand the question of power in the comprehensive sense which we have now understood, and on the other hand the question of guilt – then it is possible for us to express the two points of view which we have met in the previous section more simply, than in the last chapter. Both points of view include guilt and power, but the relation between them differs in the two points of view. Both know that there is a connexion between our ethical quality and the power which we possess, i.e. our ability to arrange the world and to overcome any resistance. The ethical question and the question of power are like two wheels in an engine which can be put in motion separately. But they are connected by transmitter belts so that the motion of the one is always transmitted to the other. But then the question is: which of the two wheels starts the movement, which is the moving and which is the moved wheel? Is power the moving force of all that happens, in relation to which guilt or innocence are merely secondary results? Or is the ethical quality the sovereign fundamental category, and are power or impotence merely secondary in relation to it? This is the question which Jesus put before the bystanders when a palsied man was let down by his friends through the roof on a bier: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'?" (Mk. II.9). In other words: where have we to look for the decisive obstacle to the life of man: in his guilt or in his impotence?

We must make the contrast between the two points of view which here confront one another as plain to ourselves as possible. For this is the real issue in the whole religious controversy of the present time. Let us take our stand in the point of view of power, which superficially forces itself on us as the only possible point of view and which at all times has been repre-



sented by strong men and Machiavellists. According to this point of view nothing else has ever been at stake in the world but the "will of power", that is to say strength and weakness, power or impotence. Ethical qualities, according to this standpoint, are always merely secondary effects of the balance of power. The strong man always also has a good conscience. A good conscience is the normal expression of strength and health. The strong man is right. Conversely the consciousness of guilt and all that is connected with it, the experience of sin, repentance and penitence, from this point of view can never be anything other than a result of impotence, a particularly painful, an appalling, expression of weakness and physical mongrelism. From this point of view Nietzsche quite consistently regarded the New Testament consciousness of guilt as a slavish sentiment. He called primitive Christianity the "servile war of morality". An agony of penitence such as Luther went through in the monastery with incomparable honesty, on this premise can only be explained by the fact that the predatory animal called man, imprisoned in his cage, in impotent despair rages against himself and wounds himself on the bars. The same idea is prevalent nowadays everywhere as a vague sentiment. It is said, more or less: "If I deny life, I must admit sin. If I admit sin, I must repent. If I repent I am a slave and inferior. And that is the doctrine of the weak, the humble, the miserable. In our view sin is contrasted to discipline, repentance and the ensuing inferiority is contrasted to pride; as contrasted to the weak there is the strong, as contrasted to pleasure which satisfies only the lower appetites, there is with us joy. . . ." If guilt is merely weakness, an inferiority complex, wretchedness, then the question of reconciliation, which caused Luther such difficult battles, does not arise at all. The question of guilt is solved if we contrast slavish inferiority with strength, pride and manly discipline.

Only if we allow this view, which has something so obvious about it, to show itself to us in its perfect form does the Biblical-reformation view of life present itself to us in its full clarity of its contrasting basis. For according to the Bible it is exactly the other way about. It is not the will of power that ultimately decides all things in the world. The merely strong man sees only the surface of Reality. He has not yet cast a glance into

the depths of our human existence. He has not yet understood the final destiny of man. The deepest meaning of our human existence is not found in the power which we attain in the world. Whether our life shows success is partly determined by many accidental circumstances which have no bearing on the innermost value of man. The innermost strength of our personality depends on whether with utter manly sincerity we have come to grips with the guilt that separates us from God, or whether at this decisive point we have been shirking. The roots of our strength are found here. All else, power, success, beauty, is secondary as compared to this.

In the days of Hitler the contrast between the ancient Germanic and the Biblical view was often described in these terms: on the one hand there is the supreme value of honour and heroism, on the other side love and humility, that is to say pity and servility. This contrast is misleading. It does not touch the heart of the contrast that separates the two views. To be sure on both sides manly honour is at stake and on both sides cowardice is repudiated. But the two sides disagree about the battlefield on which in the first place and before all other things men have to stand the test with honour if they are to be men.

The ancient Germanic sense of honour rests on a man first of all holding his own in the struggle for power with his enemies and leaving no injustice to himself or his clan unrevenged. This is the fundamental idea that returns again and again, particularly in the Icelandic sagas. Thorbjørn has killed Olaf, the son of the old Harvard. When he receives the message, Harvard breaks down with loud cries, for he feels too old to take bloody revenge. Finally he manages to get out of bed and takes revenge before daybreak. "Then Honour anew shot through his veins, giving birth to new life." "Behind the outward silence of revenge the soul burns in jubilation and pride." "The ecstasy of the Teutons is reached in the moment of revenge."<sup>2</sup> Conversely an unrevenged wrong consumes and poisons a man. A man who accepts a dishonour, even if it consists in no more than a blow with a stick or an offending word or a mocking slight, without taking bloody revenge, is expelled from the community as a "*Neiding*". A man who shows cowardice or weakness by running away and losing an

<sup>2</sup> W. Grönbech. *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, Hamburg 1937-9, pp. 56ff.



opportunity of bloody revenge, loses his moral self-respect and is a marked, lost man. The ancient Germanic honour therefore rests in the first instance on the courage which a man shows on the battlefield on which men fight for power and influence.

The Biblical view does not differ from the ancient Germanic view by suppressing a man's need of honour and substituting a weak pity. The difference is in the field of battle on which a man in the first place has to show his courage and where it is first of all decided whether he is a coward or whether he can hold his ground. The battle which Luther fought in the monastery was not an attack of cowardly feelings of inferiority. That would have been incomprehensible in a man who afterwards had the courage to face the threatening stake and to appear unarmed before the Emperor and the Diet. What was the issue in the battle in the monastery becomes clear to us when we hear how Luther spoke to his students about the new insight that had dawned on him in this struggle. In the Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans of 1515-16, in which Luther spoke for the first time about his new insight concerning the guilt of man, he did not appeal to the sense of inferiority of his listeners but on the contrary to their manly courage, to their preparedness, not to be shirkers but to face Reality even if it is crushing. He summons them to exert their entire manly strength in order to fulfil the divine commandment that demands of us: "Thou shalt not desire<sup>3</sup> but love God with thy whole heart." "*Hic ergo dico: Hui! Nunc, queso, satagite! Estote viri! Ex totis viribus vestris facite, ut non sint iste concupiscentiae in vobis. Probate, quod dicitis, 'ex totis viribus' Deum diligere posse naturaliter, sine denique gratia. Si sine concupiscentiis estis, credamus vobis, si autem cum atque in ipsis habitatis, iam nec legem impletis*" (Therefore I say, come on! Now, please do your very best! Be men! By all your strength see that these desires be not in you. Substantiate what you say: God can be loved, 'with all our strength' by nature, without grace. If you will be without desires, we shall believe you, but if you live with and in them, then you are not fulfilling the law.)"<sup>4</sup> According to Luther therefore it

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the Tenth Commandment (Ex. xx.17). The German *gelüsten lassen* means "desire" and has a wider meaning than the English "covet".

<sup>4</sup> Luther's *Römerbriefvorlesung in Anfänge reformatorischer Bibelauslegung*, ed. Ficker, 2nd edn., Leipzig 1923, VOL. II, p. 110; *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Clemen, 2nd edn., Berlin 1955, VOL. V, p. 242.

is a matter of manliness, that we should here not dodge in a cowardly manner but have the courage to admit honestly that we cannot really fulfil even the most elementary commandment of God. Absolute honesty in the question of guilt therefore is the decisive proof of manly courage. It is the ordeal by fire of our manliness that we do not take to flight like cowards but remain at our post at the point where our situation is most difficult, where we have not merely to wrestle with men but where we are standing immediately before God, who calls us to account and declares us guilty. He who does not shirk this, the most difficult battle imposed upon us, but holds out before the fiery eyes of God will be a man also in the easier battles where we have to fight against man. This is especially obvious in the case of Luther. Once he had gained the victory in the burning battle he fought with God, once his conscience had found peace through faith in the justification of the sinner, it was a small matter to him to take up arms against the whole world which threatened him with death. Physical death seemed to him irrelevant as compared to the eternal damnation which was at stake in his wrestling with God. For Jesus had said to His disciples when He sent them out (Mt. x.28), that they should not allow themselves to be frightened at mortal danger: "Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul: rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (that is to say: God)." The strength of a conscience reconciled to God has at all times produced with inner necessity the heroism with which Christian soldiers have gone to battle and to death.

From all this we conclude that according to the Biblical view the question of guilt is the central question of our life. The question of power cannot be solved until this question of guilt has been settled first. Christ made that manifest on the occasion of the healing of the palsied man: "But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home" (Mk. ii.10). The forgiveness of guilt is the decisive victory on which everything depends. The overcoming of the power of disease is merely secondary evidence that that victory has been won.

We must attempt to draw the consequences from the principle that Jesus demonstrated and actualised in the healing of the palsied man. We shall then find that this is the key to the



understanding of the whole Biblical view of life. Here it is evidently all-important for us to see correctly the relationship between the two spheres, the sphere of ethical responsibility and the other sphere in which power and impotence are at stake. They cannot be identified. They are two separate wheels, to retain the previous metaphor, which can turn independently. I can be laden with guilt and yet dominate the entire world and be admired and feared by millions. And conversely guilt can be taken from me, my conscience can be unburdened; and yet as long as I live I may languish in exile and die in misery without ever being vindicated upon earth. According to Jesus' own words, which weigh so heavily on our soul, no one can be a disciple who "does not renounce all that he has" (Lk. xiv.33), who is not prepared to disclaim all power at least on principle. This preparedness is the gate through which alone we can enter into discipleship of Jesus.

From this sharp distinction between the ethical question and the question of power as we find it in the New Testament the conclusion has repeatedly been drawn that in the New Testament only the ethical question was at issue, that Jesus desired only to educate us into being responsible personalities, that originally Christianity had no part in the question of power. A. Ritschl interpreted in this sense the seizure of dominion over the world by Christ which the New Testament calls the Kingdom, or rather the Kingship of God as a realm of ethical personalities. The dominion over the earth which in the Beatitudes Jesus promised to the meek becomes a "spiritual dominion" of the world, consisting in a belief in providence.<sup>5</sup> R. Bultmann too attributes to an editor the passages in the Gospel according to John "which are meant in the sense of the old dramatic eschatology", and sees the mission of Jesus exclusively in His putting us, at every moment of our lives, in a position of decision for or against God, so that every hour becomes the ultimate hour. Any expectations which go beyond this and promise a powerful change in terrestrial relations belong, according to Bultmann, to the field of historically determined mythology.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A. Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, Bonn 1874, VOL. III, p. 632.

<sup>6</sup> R. Bultmann, "Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums" in *Glauben und*

The element of truth in this interpretation lies in the fact that according to Jesus the way to "the life eternal" does in fact lead through giving up "houses", "fields" and any other riches and means of power for His sake and for the sake of the Gospel (Mk. x.29). That is to say, only such people will enter, in whom hunger and thirst for righteousness and communion with God (Mt. v.6) are so strong that the desire for power is relegated to the background. If however we take into account only this aspect of the portrait of Jesus then it becomes incomprehensible that in the story of the Gospels the powerful acts of Jesus (*δυνάμεις*), the healings and the raising of dead men take such a large place beside the preaching of penitence. Neither can we then understand how after the present time in which the preaching of penitence confronts men with a decision, the Jesus of the Gospels expected a second period in which the Kingdom of God will come in power (*ἐν δυνάμει*; "Truly I say to you, There are some standing here, who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk. ix.1)). But above all Christ would be no universal Leader in the decision of the ultimate questions of life, if He had had no interest in the question which has at all times occupied men most and has ever again led to new wars and revolutions, that is to say the question concerning power and money and dominion over the earth. When he heals the paralytic Jesus first of all emphasises the central importance of the question of guilt. He begins by relieving the sufferer of the burden of his guilt, unconcerned about his bodily pain. During the whole discussion with the scribes on the right to forgive sin there is no change in the physical condition of the patient. He stays paralysed on his stretcher. But that is not the end. It is followed by a demonstration of the mysterious connexion between guilt and impotence, relief of conscience and strength. The fact that Christ really is the One who is able to say without blasphemy, "Thy sins are forgiven", must also show itself outwardly in His being Lord of the powers of disease which impede human life.

This is where the transmission belt becomes visible that connects the two wheels which initially turn independently of one



another. Under the impression of this miracle of healing we get some notion of the paradoxical state of affairs: it is precisely the radical renunciation of any claim to power, the passionate and exclusive longing for forgiveness and undisturbed communion with God, that is the road to the attainment of power. It is the same thought which has maintained itself till the present time in Indian thought, where in certain circles it is believed that in the Himalaya there are "Fathers", that is to say saints, who have passed through complete "dis-thirsting" and have renounced their own ego with all its desires to the very last. These fathers are almighty. By action from a distance they can exercise dominion over the whole world. Only very rarely do they make use of this, but they could at any moment interfere with the political life of any nation. This way to attain to omnipotence is guarded against any abuse. Only he who has passed through the narrow gate of a complete absence of desire can reach this aim. This Indian thought is a certain illustration of the paradoxical connexion between absolution from guilt and the conquest of disease which Jesus put into effect on the occasion of the healing of the paralytic.

If we examine this paradoxical connexion more closely then the whole Biblical understanding of the world opens up to us. At the beginning of Biblical history we find the *original* man (*Urmensch*) who lives in untroubled communion with God and therefore in a paradisiacal condition. The dominion of the whole creation is put in his hands. But the moment guilt makes a division between God and man, world-dominion is replaced by the deepest impotence, sexual powerlessness which shows itself particularly in the dependence of the woman on the man, and economic powerlessness in our dependence on the soil by which we have to live and from which we can only by effort and perspiration extract the food which we need in order to live (Gen. III. 16ff). From this third chapter of Genesis Paul and later Judaism drew a further conclusion beyond its original meaning. Even death, the most complete impotence to which we are subject, to which we have to submit without defence because our whole resistance to the enemies of our life has broken down, is a result of our guilt before God. We ourselves have supplied death with the "sting of death", i.e. the weapon by which death keeps us in powerless dependence, as a drover

his animal. This sting of death is our sin (1 Cor. xv.56). If we were free from guilt, if we were relieved of our guilt and lived in untroubled communion with God, then we should share in God's omnipotence. We should be stronger than all that frustrates our lives and superior to death. It is therefore as Luther says: "Death would have no power over me, no sword or spike could touch me, if there were innocence and no sin. For all creatures exist and act with their Creator; as His mood is so is theirs; whom He favours they favour too, whom the Creator abandons, him also abandon the creatures, particularly when he has no clear conscience."

The whole Biblical view of the world rests on this original relation between innocence and power, guilt and impotence.

That in fact there is a connexion here and that this connexion is not a construction but is founded on the truth, is shown by certain facts of human life. We have already seen this in the life of the individual. It has often happened in the fight of man with the disease which constrains him, that as soon as a patient was relieved of a burden of conscience, he was also cured physically. This does not apply as a rule; but it can be shown in many cases that inner confusion, the nagging worm of conscience has been the secret source of suffering. When conscience has found rest, then the body is flooded with rejuvenating and healing powers. We can see this connexion even more clearly in the great movements of history. At all times in the history of mankind it is certainly not true, as it may appear to the superficial spectator, that strong battalions and inexhaustible financial resources have turned the scales. All those instruments of power have always taken second place. The decisive powers always issue from individual people or from little groups of men, who, for example, like Saint Joan or Luther, have the unlimited confidence and the unshakeable certainty that in all circumstances they must, on the highest authority, act precisely as they do act, no matter what may be the consequences. Where a man has the serene and completely unshakeable certainty that he is acting in covenant with the Lord of the Universe, there issue from him powers which can move mountains and force thousands under his influence. The saying of Jesus holds good for all situations of history: "Truly I say to you, If you have faith, and never doubt, you will not



only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea', it will be done" (Mt. xxi.21). What moves all the powers of eternity is precisely this "not doubting". On this "not doubting in your hearts", as it is called in Mark, all depends. If there is a faint trembling of uncertainty whether I really am on the right way and am speaking and acting in the name of the absolute Power, then all is lost. If on this innermost point only the slightest indecision makes itself felt, if the pendulum makes only the least movement the other way, if the seismograph shows only the slightest movement of the earth, then this immediately has a paralysing effect on any decisions which have to be taken. It robs every command that has to be given of its ultimate efficacy. A man who has been in the heat of battle knows that at moments of acute danger a soldier hears with unerring instinct by the tone of a command whether the man who is in charge knows what he is about or whether he merely feigns certainty by rough demeanour and a loud voice.

Certainty, however, concerning the ultimate command on which all power over men depends is possible only in undisturbed communion with God. I can lead men only if I am led by God. Only then can I go my way with absolute certainty and therefore without a thought for what men say, independent of the power of public opinion, of the mockery or the applause of the masses. But as soon as communion with God is lacking and I speak and act in my own name the serenity and strength of the ultimate command are replaced by a game of *va banque*, a desperate adventure to which the masses of humanity can be driven only by means of suggestion. We therefore see, however remarkable this may sound, that the power which issues from a human decision of will does not ultimately depend on the external instruments of power, money and military strength, which may be available, but on purity of conscience, that is to say on the contact with God of which speaking and acting is the outcome.

If in fact this connexion exists between the solution to the question of guilt and the solution to the question of power, then this by itself would lead to the conclusion that there can only be power which issues from a clear conscience, i.e. from communion with God. Physical energy, active in natural

events, as well as the miracles of technique and power over men, must be the outcome of the contact of a clear conscience with God. This in fact would be the case, if there were not one irrational fact of which we have spoken before, viz. the satanic rebellion against God. This satanic rebellion however, as we have seen, always lives solely by God's power. This entails the fact which is, so to speak, the negative to the positive picture that we have drawn so far: as soon as anywhere in the world a power develops which is outside communion with God, then this is not a neutral, harmless discharge of power, which is beyond good and evil, but a demoniacal rebellion against God, and intoxication with power and self-adulation are immediately active in it. If, as one usually assumes, the questions of guilt and power were entirely independent of one another, then there would be the possibility of a purely worldly striving for power from which the religious question was excluded. The two realms of which Luther spoke, the worldly political realm of the State and the inner Realm in which the Gospel holds good, could then be kept completely separate. But this is not the case. Here again one of the gearing belts becomes visible which connect the two wheels with one another. Wherever power is concentrated, where men are carried upward by the waves of historical events to dizzy heights of power, or where the millionaires of high finance make a gigantic effort to concentrate the gold and diamond mines, mineral treasures and oil-fields of the whole world in their hands, there does not only arise a calculating policy of money and power but we are immediately faced with the question concerning God. We realise the ultimate either-or. Either the power issues from genuine divine mission; man receives it from the faithful hands of God and becomes the administrator of divine powers; or he demoniacally turns his power against God and becomes an enemy of the faith. Like a sinister question mark the either-or of these twin possibilities is written over every terrestrial formation of power. As we saw before the satanic opponent of God meets God on His own level. The demoniacal mission through which man becomes intoxicated with self-worship is the diabolical counterpart to the divine mission which fills men with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore the demoniacal rebellion against God is from



God's point of view a severance from the *original* source of all power and therefore utter impotence and inner disruption. But this impotence becomes satanic strength. It contains a diabolical frenzy and a sinister capability for misleading of which whole empires can be the result. The Bible therefore knows as antitype to the miracles of God the miracles of Satan, for example those which the Antichrist will work to mislead the world (Rev. XIII.1 iff). For this is the impenetrable mystery: the devil has his power from God, he lives by robbing God. Like Prometheus he has appropriated the divine fire in order to defy God. He shares in God's omnipotence but with him it has an anti-godly key. Where works of power are happening therefore one cannot see from without whether they issue from the pure fountain of God's power or from the divine power which is demoniacally directed against God. There is some sense in it and it shows a good insight into these sinister relationships, when the scribes who have come from Jerusalem, seeing Jesus' works of power, tumble to the blasphemous conclusion: "He is possessed by Be-el-zebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons" (Mk. III.22).

In this conflict of the divine and the satanic use of power lies the antinomy, unsearchable to our reflexion, of the divine and the satanic which Luther felt so strongly. God acts in Satan. The devil is God's devil. God has given him his power. God therefore is the acting force even in the demoniacal enterprises which are directed against Him. Otherwise the almighty power of God would have been lessened and in difficult situations we should not have absolute confidence in God. And yet we must not detract from the fact that the satanic power is God's mortal enemy, that is to say not merely an intermediate stage on the way to the divine end of the world but the radically evil against which a total war must be waged. Otherwise the seriousness of all ethical responsibility is put in question. The abysmal contrast between these two truths makes the history of the world, in which divine and demoniacal formations of power have embraced each other in terrible wrestling contests, a mystery inscrutable to our human thinking. This mystery is the undoing of all human interpretations of history, not only the shallow evolutionist philosophy of history belonging to a belief in progress, and the materialist interpretation of history of

Marxism, but also the interpretation of history as a simple battle of races. The insoluble contradiction between divine and demoniacal formation of power is the fiery sword of the cherub which prohibits to the thought of fallen mankind the entry to the ultimate mystery of history. In one place only does it receive light, viz. where the combined powers of the world nailed Jesus on the Cross, that is to say where the divine and the satanic power confront each other openly. This insoluble contradiction marks the limit of our cognition beyond which we cannot get. Also in what we must say later about the divine solution of the question of guilt we shall not be allowed to forget this. We must remember all the time that at the critical point our thinking must always be confronted with this contradiction, so that the statements will not fit together.



## CHAPTER 4

### *Reconciliation and Perfecting of the World*

ALL THAT has so far been said concerning the relation of guilt and fate, the question of guilt and the question of power has the single aim of leading to the point where we encounter the hotly debated message which the first messengers of Christ carried throughout the world at the peril of their lives. The essence of this message was not a new philosophy or a new ordering of society, even though it can result in the course of time in deep philosophical truths and far-reaching social reforms; but, as Paul says, it is "the word of reconciliation", that is to say a message in which only guilt and its solution are at issue. The ministry with which all the messengers were commissioned was the "ministry of reconciliation" or, as Luther rendered it, "the ministry that preaches the reconciliation" (II Cor. v.18ff).

In the dispute about Christ which at present has broken out afresh the point is not whether we are able to admire Him as a hero or whether in terms of an heroic ideal other historical personalities must be valued more highly than He. For Jesus does not claim any human heroism; He declines any hero-worship which men may want to bestow on Him. His mission starts only where all human heroism has reached the end of its strength, where the hero is just as impotent as the coward, at the dead point beyond which no human exertion can get us. This point is the prison gate that has closed behind us when we have become guilty, and as accessories to the satanic rebellion have lost our peace with God. So long as we do not see this point because the suggestion of earthly development of power veils the abyss before which we stand, it is much better for us to spare ourselves any appreciative words about Christ, about His heroic personality and about the poetic illuminating power of His words and parables.

Jesus does not wish to hear these eulogies from us sinners,

they are just as painful to Him as the *captatio benevolentiae*, the flattery with which the Pharisees and Sadducees hypocritically approached Him in order to trick Him by crafty words: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God" (Lk. xx.21). To all those compliments which we sinners pay Him Jesus can only reply: "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (Lk. xxii.48). He would much prefer that we should deliberately enter the ranks of His enemies who have decided on His death. This would at least produce an honest situation of battle. For Jesus did not come to draw unto Himself a crowd of admirers, as human heroes can do; He came in order to fulfil a task of which no human hero is capable.

To the Pharisees who reproached Him with associating with publicans and sinners He said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lk. v.21; Mt. ix.12; Mk. ii.17). This is a fundamental word of Jesus about His mission, a word of wonderful greatness and breadth of heart. Jesus allows every one his full liberty. He forces His message on no one. He does not use the slightest pressure. If someone imagines himself "well", then Jesus has no business with him. He makes no attempt to produce inferiority complexes and a sense of guilt by delivering a shattering penitential sermon. There would be no sense in that. For in respect of our conscience we are defenceless. If our conscience declares us innocent then neither we ourselves nor anyone else can work us up to a consciousness of guilt. If our conscience accuses us then neither we ourselves nor the comforting words of anyone else can silence this accusing voice. Therefore let us be glad and grateful so long as that which the German Reformers called the "frightened conscience" is just as alien and unknown to us as the sensations of fear which come over an asthmatic during even a very minor climb are to a young man who climbs a mountain with healthy lungs. It would be ridiculous for such a young man to consult a lung specialist. "Those that are well have no need of a physician." They ought to be glad that they do not need him. Jesus is the last man to want to make healthy people sick so that he can bring them under His influence. In the first instance He comes only to those who



“have need of him”, who need Him as urgently as a seriously ill patient needs the physician. They are the people who are in the same position as Paul, Augustine, Luther, Johann Sebastian Bach, Zinzendorf and all those others, when the glorious light of the Crucified burst upon them with overwhelming power. The knowledge had dawned on them all, which Luther once in a sermon in connexion with the Marburg Dispute expressed in the shocking words: “In the eyes of the world I may be pious and do all that I should – but in God’s sight it is nothing but sin.” Men may praise me as a hero because of my great services to a good cause – and rightly so. But as soon as I come before God with my achievement, another standard comes into force. For I am God’s own. God therefore demands complete surrender to the very end. Before Him it can only be “All or naught”. If I want to keep any part of my life to myself, then I am unclean before God. Then I am accessory to the satanic rebellion against God. For I have robbed God of something that belongs to Him. I have not acknowledged His ownership of my life. Thereby something has come between God and myself. I have left the child-relationship in relation to God. I am in a condition of being far from God. But this condition is the root of all my indecision and uncertainty in the daily vital decisions, the deepest reason of my suffering in life and my fear of death.

So long as this whole connexion has not dawned on us we continue to live in blissful ignorance. It may indeed be possible for words of Jesus to shine into our lives, like the words of wisdom of Buddha or Goethe, but the ultimate meaning of the mission of Jesus is closed to us. We do not yet belong to the “sinners” to whom Jesus, as he himself says, has come in order to “call them to repentance”. Not until our eyes are opened and we get alarmed at our abysmal farness from God does it dawn on us quite suddenly that there is only one really central world-problem, one single question which burns in the soul of every one of us, beside which all other worries are put in the shade. The question is: is there a solution for guilt? Can this burden of the world be lifted? Or in other words, is there redemption for the satanic rebellion against God for which we are all responsible?

The first thing we then realise is that which is the most

striking and remarkable fact about the New Testament message concerning Christ. At his first appearance Christ relegates the solution of the question of power entirely to the background, and with a one-sidedness and concentration which is extraordinarily offensive, not only in the eyes of the world but also to His disciples, applies Himself to the one aim of breaking the spell of guilt under which the world lies. John, the forerunner, at the moment when Jesus comes to him can summarise the whole mission of Jesus in one word as in a grandiose vision: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1.29). Christ therefore has come to take away the burden which drags down the world into the bottomless pit of farness from God. This is His first task. All the rest has to take second place.

Let us illustrate this by a technical example. It is as when in a large factory, driven by electricity, the whole machinery comes to a standstill. The outsiders who know nothing of electrical engineering think that the machinery will have to be taken to pieces and rebuilt, which will demand tremendous energy. But the expert sees immediately that the machines are in order and that the stoppage can only have one invisible reason: the contact with the overland transmission line which conducts the electric current has been damaged by the weather. The technician therefore pays no attention to the machinery but goes to the ground floor where the wires are and spends all his energy on finding out where the contact has been broken so that he can restore the circuit. In the same way Jesus disappoints the expectations of those who expect works of power from Him, and, unconcerned about the need of power of His people and His disciples, He descends to the dark subterranean level in order to undo the spell that is the cause of all the disorder. One expects of Him the word of power: "Rise and go to your house!" But at first He leaves the paralytic on his stretcher and says to him: "Your sins are forgiven" (Mk II. 1-11). One expects of Him the messianic seizure of power. But He deliberately desists from any use of force and in utter loneliness at Gethsemane and on the Cross fights His battle with the power of darkness. At first we do not yet understand why the Cross was necessary. But one thing is clear at first sight: the occasion of stumbling which Jesus gives by His



behaviour is always found in this one point. He gives no solution to the question of power, which for His people under the pressure of enemy dominion was the burning question, and applies Himself exclusively to the difficult task, which those around Him did not understand, of restoring the broken connexion between God and mankind.

One might have been able to stand the exclusion of the question of power if Jesus had merely presented Himself as a penitential preacher and prophet, who had come to prepare the hearts of men for what a future man of power sent by God was to fulfil. But according to the oldest documents He referred to Himself as the One to whom all authority and power has been given, not only in heaven but also on earth, as the Son of man who will appear in clouds "with great power and glory" (Mk. xiii.26). Indeed at times He states quite clearly that He is capable of using immediately the power which God has given Him. He forbids Peter to make any use of force with these words: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. xxvi.53). This power which Jesus claims for Himself becomes visible also in single actions. The sick gather from all sides, and "the power of the Lord was with him to heal" (Lk. v.17). Yet these are merely isolated sparks of lightning in a field of force. The great discharge of power which is to change the world and for which all are waiting is not taking place. He keeps it back, He makes no use of it. Instead "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. ix.51) and descends step by step into powerlessness. This produces an almost unbearable tension which ventilates itself in these words: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (Jn. x.24). That is to say: the power which we expect, is it simply not there at all, or do You have it and are merely not using it?

The high tension of this unsolved question is present in the whole narrative of the Gospels. It is perhaps a correct observation, as Otto Borchert says, that the Gospels were written by men who themselves were scandalised at what they had to report.<sup>1</sup> Only with inner resistance did they depict Jesus, as

<sup>1</sup> Otto Borchert, *Der Goldgrund des Lebensbildes Jesu*, 3rd edn., Brunswick 1916; Engl. trans. *The Original Jesus* by L. M. Stalker, London 1933, p. 63.

making too little use of His power over all the resisting forces of the world. At any rate, at a superficial reading, a certain discrepancy strikes us in the narrative of the Gospels. On the one hand the miraculous cures take a very large place in the Gospels. On the other hand according to the same reports Jesus again and again declines the Jews' demand for miracles in sharp words: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Mt. xvi.4). According to John's Gospel Jesus speaks in much the same way before the healing of the sick man at Capernaum, saying: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe" (Jn. iv.48).

We see from the reports of the Gospels how strongly the disappointment can still be felt which Jesus caused by His whole demeanour, not only to the people but also to His most intimate disciples. The sons of Zebedee dream of the seats next to His throne which they are soon to occupy. The disciples already want to distribute the offices and the leading posts in the new Kingdom and quarrel about which of them is the greatest. But the seizure of power, which they could hardly wait for any longer, does not take place. Though all the people speak of the miraculous power of Jesus He makes no use of it precisely at the critical moment, when the powers of the world threaten with destruction the young movement which He has called into being. "You will all fall away because of me this night," He says to His disciples before His suffering (Mt. xxvi.31). Those who pass by mock the Crucified, that He who made such lofty claims of power is hanging now before all the world as a picture of misery, unable to deliver Himself from His miserable position, that now He has been publicly unmasked as an impostor: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Mt. xxvii.42). But the Lord puts up with this mockery of the people. This mysterious restraint of His miraculous power at critical moments had already driven John the Baptist in his cell by the Dead Sea to doubt: "Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?" (Mt. xi.3). This unsolved question made Judas a traitor, so that he perished body and soul.

The question why the seizure of power by Jesus is so long



delayed is noticeable as an atmosphere of high tension in the entire narrative of the Gospels. But it is also the serious concern and anxiety of the young Churches to which the Epistles of the New Testament are addressed. As early as the second half of the first century a growing uneasiness becomes noticeable in the young Church. The question is voiced: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation" (II Pet. III.4). To those who have abandoned everything in order to pass with Christ through the Cross to glory the process is much too slow. The author of II Peter has to do everything in his power to reassure the Church: "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some count slowness; but is forbearing towards you" (II Pet. III.9). The Epistle to the Hebrews too comforts the waiting Church: "For you have need of endurance so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised. For yet a little while, and, the coming one shall come, and shall not tarry" (Heb. x.36-7).

Why does Jesus hold back the deployment of His power and limit Himself entirely to the difficult task of solving the question of guilt? Why is it that between the reconciliation of consciences and the seizure of power there is an interregnum which puts the patience of the betrothed Congregation to the hardest test? Why this interval under the pressure of which some become sceptics and others mockers and traitors? From this apparent exclusion of the question of power from Jesus' programme the conclusion has been drawn that for the early Church to attribute to her Master a claim to power over the world must have been a Jewish misunderstanding; and that it is a continuation of this misunderstanding for some people still to expect, in feverish agitation, a dramatic cosmic catastrophe, in which the returning Christ will ascend the throne of the world. In reality Christ was precisely not a political but an inward and spiritual Messiah. His dominion was the "realm within", the kingdom of inwardness. He drew a clear division between the outer world with its brutal methods of power and the salvation of the soul, and limited Himself to being a "shepherd and bishop" of individual souls. That is what He meant when he said: "My Kingship is not of this world" - "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" -

"Who made me a judge or divider over you?" (Jn. xviii.36; Mt. xxii.21; Lk. xii.14). The struggle between this spiritualised Messianic calling and the political-national Messianic expectation which He met among His people was the tragedy of His life and eventually caused His death.

If this conclusion were right then the entire New Testament would be one great misunderstanding of what Jesus actually wanted. For all the witnesses speaking there are men who like the virgins in the parable go out with burning lamps to meet the Bridegroom. If this final act of the drama of the world is a *fata morgana*, "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. xv.19; R.S.V. note). Then we have wasted our life on an illusion. But above all Jesus' own words and actions as presented to us by the most ancient documents show that the question of power over the earth was in no way imposed on Him from without by the tragic misunderstanding of His Jewish hearers or His fanciful disciples' dreams of the future. On the contrary, this question burned in His own heart long before He enlisted disciples and gathered masses of people. This question is the theme of the inner struggle which is depicted in the story of the temptation, in which He decided the road which He was to follow in order to fulfil His mission. For the "crafty and powerful spirit" which met Him in His temptation evidently put before Him the possibility of seizing immediately, by a bold stroke, the power of all the realms of the world, which he showed Him from a high mountain. But Jesus overcame the temptation and chose instead obedience to God, who pointed in the opposite direction. This decided His whole destiny. But this decision does not mean that He declined the seizure of power, He merely delayed it. Jesus never left His disciples in any uncertainty as to that. That is the fundamental thought of the Beatitudes, which according to Mt. v.1ff Jesus speaks to those who follow Him. For this is the meaning which is common to the otherwise differing reports as we find them in Matthew and Luke: *Now* you who have followed me are poor, mourning, meek, hungry, thirsty, weeping, persecuted, reproached, falsely accused and defamed; *now* I am not yet allowed to use my power over the forces of the enemy in order to protect and deliver you who suffer for my sake; *now* you are outlawed. "I



send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves," that is to say I expose you without defence to all enmity. But *then* a change takes place. The Kingdom of God comes in power. All relations of power are reverted. The Kingdom is given to you. You will inherit the earth (Mt. v.5). You will be filled (Lk. vi.21). You will laugh and leap for joy. In all these words two elements become clear at once:

1. The present must be seen entirely in the light of the marching order which Jesus received from the Father on the occasion of the temptation. Nothing is done to put right the glaring discrepancy between the superior power of the realms of the world and the impotence of the Church of Christ. Not even the initial measures are taken to prepare for a shifting of the balance of power to the Church of Christ. Christ creates no organisation or institution, not even a colony of monks for mutual assistance. He enlists no bodyguard, gathers no money, establishes no connexions with authoritative personalities. The change of the entire balance of power, the establishment of the Royal Government of Christ is left to God alone. One cannot even prepare for it. One can only wait for God in infinite trust.

2. This leaving undone of any measures which aim at power and influence does however not mean a giving up of the claim to power. Postponed is not abandoned. The fact that Jesus adopts a merely negative attitude, does not lift a finger, carefully avoids any steps which might lead in this direction, this fact is the very expression of His unshakeable conviction that the cause is safe in the hands of Almighty God. The change is therefore inevitable.

From whence comes this twofold attitude of Jesus? Why is Jesus sure of the coming change in the relations of the world and yet agrees with all His soul to God's delay in seizing of power and steadfastly adheres to this line to the bitter end against the wishes of the people and His disappointed disciples and against all temptation? We can understand this only if we keep in mind the principles which we had to describe above. Then two things became clear:

1. The problem of guilt is the cosmic problem. All impotence and the whole ensuing war of competition between limited powers is merely the outward expression of our being far from God. If therefore the spell of guilt is lifted, if there is reconcilia-

tion, then there must be an end to all impotence and the sole dominion of God over Reality must come in power. That is why Jesus as the Mediator in full confidence expects the seizure of power. It simply has to come with the same inevitability with which the harvest follows the sowing of the seed, with which the mustard seed, once it has been sown, must develop into a huge plant without anybody's interference. It may be expected just as surely as the leavening of the whole dough, once the leaven has been put in (Mt. XIII.3ff, 31ff). The irresistible necessity with which the second has to come once the first is there, is therefore not merely the expectation that what has been started must also be finished, as it is usually understood. That would not be an absolute necessity. For a building on which work has been started need not inevitably be completed. Maybe it has to remain unfinished for lack of funds. A work of art may remain a torso if the artist dies while working on it or if he can no longer find the strength to finish it. Here however we find a far more stringent connexion than that between beginning and end. That is the necessary unity between a thing and that which belongs to its essence so that it simply must be there if the thing itself is there. A live seed must germinate when it is sown in the earth because this belongs to its essence. A fire must produce light and heat because otherwise it is not a fire at all.

2. But precisely at this point it must be expressed most decisively that in spite of the indissoluble essential connexion between the questions of guilt and power the emphasis is entirely and solely on the question of guilt and the decision in the question of power is merely the inevitable result of what has already been decided in the field of the question of guilt. Those people alone can receive the privilege of sharing in the seizure of power by Christ, to whom the desire of power has become as nothing compared to the hunger and thirst for righteousness before God which fills their whole soul. This interval therefore, in which the God's display of power is delayed for the sake of His people, is the fire in which the gold is purified from slag (1 Pet. 1.7). Only he who is not concerned about his own power and salvation but only about God and reconciliation with Him, is able to bear this interregnum of impotence without going to pieces. The meaning therefore of



this intervening time between the redemption and the perfecting of the world is the gathering of the Church. We can understand the essence of the Church of Christ only from the tension which is contained in this unfinished state.

By all this we have so far, without as yet going into any detail, given a broad outline of the fundamental thoughts which will have to be developed and described in what follows. Three themes have sprung up which will have to be discussed in three sections. We shall first have to discuss how Christ solves the question of guilt, that is to say the act of redemption by Christ; secondly we shall have to discuss the solution of the question of power, that is to say the perfecting of the world, which begins with the Resurrection of Christ. Only then can a third section draw the connecting lines between those two, and show the essence of the Church which lives in the interval between the redemption and the perfecting of the world.

PART TWO  
THE REDEEMER



## CHAPTER 5

### *The Aim and the Act of Redemption*

WE SAW in the preceding section that with His call to repentance Jesus does not in the first place address Himself to the "well" who have not been shocked by themselves. He addresses Himself to those who have discovered with a shock that there is something wrong between God and themselves and that this is the reason why they try to escape from themselves and cannot find the right relationship to their fellow-men. They are the people of whom Luther's saying holds good: "Only he can pray profoundly who has been shocked profoundly." Only on this narrow circle of men has it dawned that the question of guilt is the central question of human life. To the others the message of the New Testament concerning Christ is incomprehensible.

But if we do belong to this narrow circle of people, then the first question that arises is: is it not the simplest thing in the world to do away with a wrong that has been done? After all we men can pray for forgiveness when we have done something wrong. I admit that I have wronged the other person. The other shakes hands with me to indicate that he is reconciled and everything is all right again. If this is possible amongst mere humans, could there then be any problem at all in the case of God, who is surely infinitely above being offended in any human sense? Is it not, as Adolf Harnack says in his criticism of Anselm's doctrine of redemption, a "terrible thought that God should have the awful privilege over us men, that He cannot forgive for love?"<sup>1</sup> That sounds very plausible, if only the major premise upon which this whole conclusion from human forgiveness to divine forgiveness is built were right. The major term which entails the conclusion,

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 4th edn., Tübingen 1909, VOL. III. The quotation is a new translation but there is an English translation, *History of Dogma*, by J. Millar, London 1894-7, of the 3rd German edn. of 1894-7 (VOL. III).

is that we humans can forgive one another without further ado. But is this true? After what we have already said we must deny this. We men cannot forgive one another; for strictly speaking we have not sinned against one another at all.

Even if we have ill-treated, dishonoured, defrauded, robbed one another, yet, as we have seen, the guilt which we have incurred concerns only God the Creator. We have sinned against Him alone. If someone really forgives me the injury I have done to him, then this is an inaccurate expression. We should say more precisely that God has forgiven me and that this person is acting toward me as God's mouthpiece, and as a priest announces to me the divine remission of the guilt which I have incurred before Him. If we eliminate God from our dealings with one another and if we meet one another merely on the worldly level, then we can neither become guilty before each other nor forgive one another. We then merely confront each other as two centres of power which both desire to become strong and happy and have come into conflict because one has not fulfilled the expectations of the other. If after this clash of our respective interests we make offers of peace then this can only mean that we have come to an agreement like two world powers which after a war sign a peace treaty and agree under certain conditions to stop hostilities. In this treaty the only issue at stake is the delineation of spheres of power. The question of guilt remains untouched. The question whether we can lift the invisible spell that separates us from God is not even raised. But if between me and someone else the question of guilt really is at issue, if I have broken up his life and am not content with reaching an agreement but struggle to receive from him real forgiveness by a thorough discussion and complete confession, then I notice at once that the lifting of the spell over us is not within our power at all. Forgiveness is possible only if we both stand before God against whom we have sinned and if the incomprehensible thing happens that God bridges the abyss that yawns between us. All our attempts to apologise to each other and to forgive one another always lead along various roads to the one insoluble question whether God whose enemies we have become can be reconciled to us again or not, whether through Him we receive strength to forgive one another in His name. Human "forgiveness" there-



fore does not, as Harnack thinks, make God's forgiveness more comprehensible; on the contrary it makes us realise the full import and incomprehensibility of divine forgiveness.

That is shown in a deeply moving manner by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's short story "The Saint", in which the whole problem of forgiveness is demonstrated by an historical example. King Henry has seduced the daughter of the chancellor Thomas Becket, his only daughter, the most precious thing he has in the world, whom he had hidden and guarded from the world like a relic. This has broken the Chancellor's paternal heart. Thereafter the strong man struggles to be able to forgive, and this struggle drives him to asceticism and to the monastery. There a crossbowman sees him walk up and down for hours in a recess where in a dark corner is hanging a large wooden Crucifix, "a coarse, poor work of art but a head with moving lines". Thomas holds conversation with this browned Crucifix. The crossbowman comes nearer "with quiet steps, faintly smiling. 'Son of Japhet', he said to me, 'You have lived among the sons of Shem and you know that they do not believe that the Eternal has allowed His only Son to be nailed on the Cross — how do you teach them better?' I raised my eyes firmly to the chancellor and said without fear: 'My Saviour kissed the traitor Judas and forgave His tormentors; but such a thing is impossible for a mere man for it is contrary to nature and blood.' Lord Thomas softly wagged his head. 'You have spoken rightly,' he said, 'it is difficult and impossible.'"

Not until we have seen from such a case in practical life that in any difficult circumstances forgiveness among men is in fact impossible, do we realise that the destiny of the world is determined by the question whether God forgives and whether therefore on this ground forgiveness is also possible between people and nations estranged from one another by guilt, or whether in all eternity there is no forgiveness for a wrong that has been done.

We ourselves cannot possibly answer this question, or contribute anything to its solution. For as soon as the guilt is there it is beyond our control. When we enter the ranks of God's enemy, the record which this act leaves in God's books is indelible. But not only do we no longer have any right to say anything on the question whether divine forgiveness is possible,

because guilt is no longer within our province. We are not able to say anything; for the problem is just as insoluble to our reflexion as it is to our volition. We can only conceive the solution in two ways: either that which has happened must be undone again; we should return to the *status quo ante*, to the state of innocence in which we lived before we fell. Or the divine commandment that we have violated must be cancelled; the claim of God on our lives would be annulled. Together with the commandment the guilt of the transgression would then cease. Both are equally unthinkable. What has been done can no longer be undone. The decision made against God remains in God's memory for all eternity. And it is just as impossible that God's claim on us should be annulled. For that would mean that God Himself had ceased. It belongs to His essence that all that exists exists for Him.

When the idealist philosophers thought that forgiveness of guilt was a possible philosophical concept, they did not yet see that guilt concerns a "Thou" which is not within our power. They thought that guilt concerns our own absolute ego, and was therefore something that takes place within the field where we are our own masters. This is how Kant in his *Religion within the boundary of Pure Reason* arrived at the solution of the question of guilt which closed to him an understanding of the Gospel. Kant says: "How it is possible that a naturally bad man makes himself a good man is beyond our understanding; for how can a bad tree produce good fruit? As however, according to the statements made before, an originally (as regards its natural predisposition) good tree has in fact produced bad fruit, and a corruption from good into evil (as long as one remembers that this is due to freedom) is not more comprehensible than a rise from bad to good, then the possibility of the latter cannot be denied. For in spite of that corruption the commandment yet sounds with equal strength in our soul: we *shall* become better men: therefore we must be able to, even if that which we are capable of doing is by itself insufficient and even if thereby we only make ourselves susceptible to a higher assistance which is inscrutable to us."<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, I St. v; there is an English trans. *Religion within the boundary of Pure Reason* by J. W. Semple, Edinburgh 1838.



other words, by a free intelligible act I have decided for the evil principle. I have taken a step back; consequently I can also take the same step forward. That would be true if the guilty act took place only within the four walls of my own ego where I am alone with myself and responsible only to myself. I could then forgive myself and declare my action null and void. That would settle the case and all its traces would be erased. But I am not alone with myself. My action has not only left an impression within myself which I can erase by a second act; it has entailed a second effect which I can no longer efface by a free act – an effect on my relationship to God. That is the majesty of the accomplished act. It partakes of eternity because it cannot be undone in all eternity.

In his *Philosophische Brocken* Kierkegaard demonstrates this eternal import of the moment by two examples of which we shall here only mention the second: "Two armies are facing each other, prepared for battle; a knight approaches, both parties invite him to join; he chooses one party, is defeated and taken prisoner. As a prisoner he is led before the victor and is foolish enough to offer him his services on the same conditions as were offered to him before. Will not the victor answer: 'My good man, you are now my prisoner: certainly, you could have made a different choice before, but now it is all changed.' Is not that strange?"<sup>3</sup> This example shows that it is an entirely mistaken calculation if with Kant we think that, because we have performed an act freely, we can equally freely undo it.

Equally superficial is the manner in which Fichte, in his tenth Lecture on the "Way to the Blessed Life", skips over the problem of reconciliation, when he says that the religious man "knows no repentance for the past, for in so far as he was not in God he was nothing, and that is now past, and only since his mystic communion with the deity has he been born to life; but inasmuch as he was in God, what he has done is right and good." Here too the ego believes that it is alone with itself and that it can relegate its own actions to the field of the "non-existing" or annul them. I could do this if, to use a commercial expression, I were my own creditor, that is to say

<sup>3</sup> S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. D. F. Swenson, Oxford 1936, p. 11.

creditor and debtor in one person. I could then myself keep an account of my debts and just cross out the entries which are charged to my account and declare them null and void. But unfortunately it is not quite so easy as that. For the accounts are kept by Someone else over whose book-keeping I have no influence. I cannot enter anything in the book nor cross anything out. The attempt of the ego to reconcile itself with itself and so to escape from the problem of guilt leads Fichte and his school to the speculation that even in its self-estrangement and negation the absolute ego remains identical with itself. Reconciliation, which is the centre of all higher religions, is consequently merely an expression of a unity which need not be restored by any particular act but in itself (*"an sich"*) is already present. David Friedrich Strauss works this thought out in his *Christian Dogmatics*. According to Strauss the Church's doctrine of redemption is merely a form of expressing the already present reconciliation of the spirit with itself.<sup>4</sup> Here too the relative human ego is sovereign over its relationship with the absolute Ego. Without hesitation guilty man identifies himself with the Absolute and decrees with enviable self-assurance that this unity which simply exists "in itself" cannot have been undone by any guilt. The debtor takes his place at the desk of the creditor, crosses out the entry of his debt in the latter's ledger and declares that there has always been a good relationship between him and his creditor and that what has happened has no influence on this.

The same self-assurance with which man himself disposes of his guilt in virtue of his alleged unity with the Absolute is found also, though not with the same philosophical clarity as in Fichte and Hegel, in Hauer's *Deutscher Gottschau*. Man "is prepared to answer to the highest judicial authority for what he has done," to "be judged, i.e. justified (*ge-richtet*)."<sup>5</sup> But he fears no "last judgment" that will decide his eternal destiny and award him heaven or hell. He knows that the "eternal judge" at every moment is near to his own bosom and he renders him account and answer. *But this is the same person who also ushered him into life and determined his destiny.* He therefore faces the judge as one who has to give account and yet at the

<sup>4</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre*, Stuttgart 1841, vol. II, pp. 333, 346.



same time may rest in this ultimate Reality. In the same way to the men of the Edda the fate from which guilt arose and the god who as *fultrui* was near to the hero were fundamentally one and the same. . . . Therefore his *repentance* is different from that of the Christians. *It is the harmony of pain with broken laws and serene confidence that this becoming and being guilty also belongs to the totality of his life.*<sup>5</sup>

In minor cases this self-absolution may put us at ease. But as soon as something serious happens, like domestic infidelity which destroys the happiness of two people, or when the hours come when we are most honest with ourselves, in the face of death, when our life once more passes before our eyes like a film in the blinding light of the approaching dawn of eternity, then all these speculative attempts to absolve ourselves fail. Not until this has become inescapably clear to us through our own and others' disturbing experiences has the negative condition been created for an understanding of the Gospel. We then see that in theory the lifting of the spell of guilt and the return of the guilty one to the lost paradise of innocence is unthinkable, and in practice it is something beyond our strength that no power on earth is capable of achieving. When this negative insight has been acquired, then our ears are open to the New Testament message of reconciliation.

The messengers of Jesus testify to all men and nations that something has happened which to our reflexion and cognition is an impossible possibility. In Christ God has reconciled Himself with us. When the Apostles as Christ's messengers ask all people: "Be reconciled to God" (II Cor. v.20), they assume that all men share in the satanic enmity to God. For one can speak of reconciliation only if there is enmity. If I have merely remained below the ideal of holiness and perfection, that is to say if I have not entirely reached the end that God had intended for me though I have done my level best, then I need leniency and patience with my weakness. But no one would in that case speak of reconciliation. If I am reconciled with someone then he must have been my enemy. This is expressed particularly clearly in Rom. v.10: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his

<sup>5</sup> Hauer, *Deutsche Gottschau*, p. 146.

life." But he who is an enemy is always a mortal enemy who by all possible means wants to destroy his opponent. If we are God's enemies then we want to dethrone God. We do not wish Him to be King over us. We wish God were not there and that we could sit on His throne. This mad desire which does in fact arise in us as often as we are dominated by an unclean passion however, as we saw before, can not be the will of an isolated individual. If I raise my hand against God – and every guilty act is a movement aimed not at men but at God – then that power wills in me, that encounters God on the supra-polar level of existence which is peculiar to Him, the power that makes the monstrous claim to take the place which is God's exclusive prerogative; that is to say transcendent presence yet filling all things.

Every lie in which we get entangled, every unclean desire by which we allow ourselves to get intoxicated, is merely a single spark of a volcanic eruption which aims at the destruction of God's creation. By that, as we have seen, creation has not only broken with its Creator and lost contact with its origin, and thereby become powerless, unstable and unhappy. The satanic consists in this: that this negation of the Creator has become a position, a positive counter-action against God. The impotence of God-forsakenness becomes a demoniacal counterpart of the divine omnipotence, viz. the diabolical power of ungodliness. The unhappiness which arises from the loss of fellowship with God becomes a demoniacal counterpart of the blessedness of God's children, viz. the diabolical lust for sin, the intoxicating voluptuousness of earthly pleasure. The latter is so to speak preying on the blessedness which we can only have in God. The ugliness of the ungodly condition becomes a diabolical counterpart to the glory of God, viz. the demoniacal beauty of sin. We can see this in the Caesarean splendour of the titanic man, in the "fine blond brute" of whom Nietzsche speaks. In the ecstasy of his omnipotence the superman sets himself on the throne of God.

That is how there comes about the inextricable confusion of divine and diabolical, of power and impotence, of ecstasy and misery to which the Revelation of John refers, when it says that Satan is the "entangler" (A.V., R.S.V., "deceiver") of the whole world (*ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην*, Rev. xii.9). Only



if we are fully aware of this inextricable situation of the world can we measure what it means when the witnesses of Jesus in triumphant joy carry throughout the world the message that the Gordian knot of the world's fate is cut. Christ was sent "to destroy the works of the devil". Jesus can sum up the critical hour of the world, the Present which begins with His advent, in these words: "Now is the crisis (A.V., R.S.V., "judgment") of this world: now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (Jn. xii.31). He can say in the Gospel according to Luke: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk. x.18). How is this possible? There is only one answer to this question: "Satan" cannot "cast out Satan" (Mk. iii.23). "But when one stronger than he (i.e. Satan) assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoil" (Lk. xi.22).

The mission of Christ and the Church founded thereby is God's counteraction to the satanic attack on the sole sovereignty of God. That the whole mission of Christ can in fact be summed up in this is perhaps most clearly expressed in Paul's argument in 1 Cor. xv.24-8. It is said there that Christ will return the royal authority committed to Him to God the Father, that is to say His mission will be fulfilled "after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign (*βασιλεύειν*) until he has put all his enemies under his feet. . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone." God therefore has assigned to Him authority over the world to the one purpose that He should in His name bring to a victorious end the conquest of the whole attack of anti-godly powers which prevents the perfection of Creation. As soon as the last enemy is vanquished He will return the mandate to God who had given it to Him. He will then have completed His task. The removal of the confusion caused by the satanic rebellion is therefore the ultimate meaning of Christ's mission on earth. If this satanic revolt had not taken place then the mission of Christ on earth would not have ensued. Creation would then at the outset have been in the state which will come about when Christ after the victorious completion of His battle returns the Kingdom to the Father. God would then be "all in all" or

"everything to everyone" (1 Cor. xv.28). The immediate relation of all creatures with God, of which Idealism speaks, would then not have been disturbed. The fact that is most offensive not only to the present generation but to all natural men, and which seems to be an insult to their human dignity, viz. that in the ultimate question of life we are not able to take our own destiny in hand, that we are dependent on something that comes to us "from without" as the word of a Leader whom we ourselves have not chosen but who received authority from God – this vexatious fact would in itself not have been necessary. This offensive act of God has become necessary because of our obnoxious behaviour towards God. It is the abnormal remedy for an abnormal situation for which we are partly responsible.

It is all-important for an understanding of the apostolic message that we should realise that the overcoming of Satan is not something new that is additional to redemption. Both are rather one and the same thing, merely viewed from different sides. For we need redemption precisely only because we are God's enemies. That is what we are as accomplices of the satanic rebellion against God.

That the reconciliation of the world and the undoing of the satanic counter-movement are one and the same thing merely seen from different points of view, is also shown by this: in the reconciliation as well as in the overcoming of Satan the New Testament distinguishes two stages which form a unity and which yet have to be kept apart, the solution of the question of guilt and the solution of the question of power. We have *now* received the reconciliation (*νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν*). But we shall be saved in the *future* (*σωθησόμεθα*, Rom. v.10f). Because both belong together to the one act of God, we can be sure, since the first has happened, that the second will take place (Rom. v.10). The Seer of the Apocalypse sees exactly the same two stages of the one act of God when he says: "By the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. xii.11) "the great dragon . . . that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (v. 9) was cast down out of heaven. That is to say: he was removed from the place where, as "the accuser of our brethren", he "accuses them day and night before our God" (Rev. v.10). "Therefore rejoice, O



heaven, and you that dwell therein" (v. 12). But Satan is thereby not yet destroyed. On the contrary he has been cast down to the earth (v. 9), therefore "Woe to you, O earth and sea: for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short" (v. 12). Not until the future after a final hard battle will the devil be cast into the sea of fire and will an end be made of his working on the earth.

If we leave the spatial metaphor of his being cast down from the upper heavenly into the lower terrestrial sphere and attempt to express what this means, without the metaphor of space, then this can only mean that in virtue of Christ's deeds and sufferings on earth the devil is robbed of the right which, for example, he still exercises in Job 1, the right to appear before God as the accuser of the Church. His legal claim on those whom he has corrupted becomes null and void. His charge against men becomes illegal. But only at the end of the present era will he also lose the power, the ability to deceive the world. This dispossession of Satan, the cancellation of his accusations and his titles is evidently the same as what in another form of expression is called reconciliation, by which God reconciles the world with Himself. But the disarming of Satan is the perfecting of the delivered creation, the salvation of the Church, the glorification of the reconciled world.

The act of redemption which according to the testimony of the Apostles Christ accomplished on earth therefore did not consist in robbing Satan of his power. Through all the Epistles of the New Testament runs the warning and the strengthening for the battle against Satan.<sup>6</sup> But Satan was deprived of the right to accuse mankind before God. Expressed in spatial terms, Satan fell like lightning from heaven (Lk. x.18). He has lost his position in God's presence. This has brought about an entirely new situation. The guilt which men have incurred before God because of the satanic enmity to God can no longer prohibit their access to Him. With a reconciled conscience they can withstand the rage of Satan who in the short time which he still has left raves against the Church with unbroken strength. That is what is meant when the Apocalypse says: "By the blood of the Lamb" that has reconciled them with

<sup>6</sup> Foerster in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament*, ed. Kittel, vol. II, p. 80.

God the Churches of the martyrs, in times of persecution and outward ruin, have overcome Satan "by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. xii. 11).



## CHAPTER 6

### *The Adversary with whom Christ Wrestled*

IN ALL that we have said so far we have grasped only the purpose of the work of reconciliation, the glorious result which Christ has achieved by the sacrifice of His life to the death on the Cross. This does not yet make us understand how this result was achieved, why the mortal struggle and the complete disgrace of the Son of God was necessary for victory. But the certainty that Christ has in fact gained this result, that is to say the certainty as to the fact of reconciliation, is far more important for our practical life than the understanding of how, that is to say the answer to the question why the life, suffering and death of the sinless Christ were necessary to reconcile us with God. For centuries the healing power of certain hot springs was proved in practice by people who were suffering from gout and rheumatism. Thousands were thus cured. But only during the last fifty years has science discovered the explanation of these cures and stated that this healing power comes from the radium present in the springs. The fact of the healing power of these springs was far more important than its explanation. The experience of the healing power always comes first, scientific attempts to explain follow afterwards and have meaning only if and so long as the experience of the healing power exists. It is the same with reconciliation through Christ. Doctrine on reconciliation takes a comparatively small place in the New Testament. It is usually merely hinted at. But through the whole of the New Testament sounds the many-voiced witness that Christ is in fact the Stronger One (*ὁ ἰσχυρότερος*, Lk. xi.22) who has bound the strong one in whose power we were, and that therefore the condemnation of those "who are in Christ Jesus" has been annulled (Rom. viii.1). Everything depends on this fact of experience. The most ingenious explanations of it would lose all interest as soon as the reconciling power of Christ was no longer experienced within

the Church in every generation. A "theology of the Cross" is always merely an attempt to copy reflectingly what has happened to thousands of people who in the face of death, with the foundation of their earthly life removed, founded in infinite confidence their eternal existence on the finished work of Christ. Let us take just a few typical examples from the great abundance of experience of thousands of people. We mention first of all Martensen-Larsen who, with an unexampled honesty and thoroughness, shirked no doubt, however fundamental, as regards the existence of God and the historicity of reconciliation, and descended to the uttermost depths of melancholy and despair. But then, when he had no hope left of ever setting himself inwardly to rights and was facing utter ruin, the miracle happened. He had the experience of Odysseus who after years of wandering was eventually brought home without his own doing in his sleep. He wrote about this: "And then, brother, it happened, the great, the wonderful event, it happened in front of the Cross of Jesus in whose holy presence I knew I was. The ice-crust round my soul broke. And as in spring when the rivers thaw, the great pieces of ice float down the stream and the running water becomes visible again, so as by a miracle doubt and fear were carried away and my soul began to feel free and to breathe freely again. For the first time in my time of distress, indeed perhaps for the first time in my life I felt that I had been heard. It was *finished*. A serene conviction of that arose within me. At last, at last my prayer had been heard. From the hidden world of the Spirit the certitude of faith was flowing into my soul. I could believe! I did believe! When we got up from prayer, I ventured softly to hint at the change which had taken place within me. 'Just imagine', I said, 'I really do believe, I have now crossed the mountain.' And I received strength to speak to my friend quite quietly of the abysmal thoughts which had arisen within me, and how strange it seemed to me that precisely he should have been chosen to help me. And when I entered my room and went to bed I hardly knew what I was doing. I cried and laughed, laughed and cried. The spell was broken. I read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and for the first time for months I could sleep and wake up without being tormented by my thoughts of ill fate. For the first time I could think of my lovely home in



Jutland without pain. 'I will love the Lord who bore all my sins' – I had to say this ancient Danish hymn of the days of the Reformation to myself silently again and again during that night. And when the morning came, thanks be to God! – I could hardly believe it – the fear had gone. My dear brother and reader, – you will understand that in that evening hour the Cross of Christ became the fixed centre of my life."<sup>1</sup>

Beside Martensen-Larsen we mention an example from the Indian world, the Indian feminist leader Pandita Rhamabai. She was not a case of a thwarted existence, a shipwrecked being escaping into the haven of grace, but a woman of purest race and noble visage, a personality of consummate self-discipline. As a leader in the battle for the liberation of Indian womanhood she had given years of service to her people and gained decisive victories. In her biography she is quoted as saying of the time nine years after her baptism: "For some years after my baptism I was comparatively happy to think that I had found a religion that gave its privileges equally to men and women; there was no distinction of caste, colour or sex made in it." But now that was no longer sufficient. "Sin revived," she could say with Paul, "and I died." – "I was desperate," she writes, "I realised that I was not prepared to meet God, that sin had dominion over me, that I was not altogether led by the Spirit of God and had not therefore received the Spirit of adoption and had no witness of the Spirit that I was a child of God." Now for the first time a real encounter with the Crucified took place. "I do not know if any of my readers has ever had the experience of being shut up in a room where there was nothing but thick darkness and the groping in it to find something of which he or she was in dire need. I can think of no one but the blind man whose story is given in Jn. ix. He was born blind and remained so for forty years of his life; and then, suddenly, he found the Mighty One who could give him eyesight. Who could have described his joy at seeing the daylight when there had not been a particle of hope of his ever seeing it? Even the inspired Evangelist has not attempted to do it. I can only give a faint idea of what I felt when my mental eyes were opened and when I who was sitting in darkness saw Great Light, and

<sup>1</sup> Martensen-Larsen, quoted from the German edn. of *Zweifel und Glaube*, Leipzig 1911.

when I felt sure that to me, who but a few moments ago sat in the region and shadow of death Light had sprung up. . . . I looked to the blessed Son of God who was lifted upon the Cross and suffered death, even the death of the Cross, in my stead, that I might be made free from the bondage of sin and from the fear of death, and I received life. O the love, the unspeakable love of the Father for me, a lost sinner, who gave His only Son to die for me! I had not merited this but that was the very reason why He showed it toward me."<sup>2</sup>

All these witnesses to the reconciling authority of the crucified Son of God – and they could easily be multiplied a thousand times from the history of the Church and of Christian Missions – have one characteristic in common. At all times they all speak exclusively of the "that", not of the "how", of the incomprehensible fact that on the Cross Christ completed for us all that to which we ourselves in spite of all our efforts could not make the slightest contribution: the elimination of the guilt of the world in which our own guilt is comprehended. All these testimonies are not doctrines of reconciliation. They are merely expressions of the "comforted despair" which Luther means when he writes to the monk Georg Spenlein in his temptation: "My dear brother, get to know Christ, get to know Him as the Crucified, learn to sing His praise and to say to Him, while despairing of yourself: 'Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness. I am Thy sin'."

But even though all these testimonies bear witness only to the fact of the reconciliation, the fact of the completed victory of Christ, yet this testimony to the fact provides the basis for all that we have to say, when we have heard of the fact, regarding its interpretation. The simple experience of the healing power of the completed work of Christ immediately leads to a statement regarding what must have happened for this power of reconciliation to be there. For if in Christ God really has reconciled the world with Himself then at any rate we know the object at which the work of Christ is aimed. The reconciliation aims, as we saw, at the mortal enmity which exists in our hearts against God. More precisely, it aims at God's mortal enemy who wills within us and who arises against God on the whole front in order to stir up the cosmos against the Creator.

<sup>2</sup> Macnicol, *Pandita Rhamabai*, London 1926, pp. 86-9.



Our guilt gives this opponent of God a claim on us. We have a reconciled conscience as soon as the devil has been deprived of this claim on us.

As already said in the preceding chapter the meaning of the work of Christ can be summarised as follows: it is the great divine counter-action against the satanic rebellion, or expressing this more pregnantly, the anti-diabolical action. At the historical moment of His arrest, when Jesus delivered Himself to the police so that they could do with Him whatever they wished, He said to his enemies: "When I was with you day after day, in the temple, you did not lay hands on me: but this is your hour and the power of darkness" (*ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ σκοτους*, Lk. xxii.53). In the same sense Jesus says in the farewell addresses of John's Gospel: "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me" (Jn. xiv.30). Before this there had continually been fresh moments when the invisible enemy of God tried to proceed to the final blow against Him. Those were the moments when the rage of His Jewish opponents, whom Jesus regarded as children or instruments of the devil (Jn. viii.44), rose to the highest pitch so that they took stones in order to kill Him, or attempted to arrest Him. But the time of the final battle was not yet. "They sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come" (Jn. vii.30). And once more in the same chapter: "Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him" (v. 44). But when the Roman guard, guided by the traitor, surrounded Christ on all sides so that no escape was possible any more, then the hour had come for which the enemy had been waiting, "your hour", the hour of the enemy. Now the prince of the world comes. The enemy approaches. He has gathered his whole army and kept them for this final decisive battle.

The Gospel according to John therefore leaves no doubt as to the meaning of Jesus' difficult battle, which began with the first attempts at His murder by His pharisaic and Herodian opponents and ended with His crucifixion. What happens here is not merely a matter between God and mankind. So long as we regard God and mankind as the only two parties between whom Christ intervenes as the Mediator, we cannot understand the terrible war which Jesus had to fight. What

happens here is on the contrary God's great final settlement of the satanic opposing power which has arisen against Him. In his explanation of Ps. xc.16 Luther says: "Moses wants to say: 'Provide Thou us with a work against the work of Satan. . . . The work of Satan is that he has trampled us down and through sin has thrown us out of life into death, as Heb. ii.14 calls Satan one who has the power of death; against such work of Satan Christ has come with His work and deprived death of its power and brought life to light.'" The work of Christ therefore is the great counter-campaign against the revolution which Satan has introduced into creation. Only this makes an understanding of what happened at Gethsemane and Golgotha accessible, as far as we men can get any understanding of this at all.

It is *a priori* evident that for an understanding of Christ's work of reconciliation there is only one or the other of two possibilities.

Either the satanic power which opposes God on the whole front is reality. Then we cannot understand the entire present situation of the world unless we take this reality into account. The sinister existence of this power is the key to the understanding of the whole situation of the world. Then the redemption of the world cannot be other than the great final war with the power that is hostile to God. Then the victory over God's mortal enemy must not appear as a mere subsidiary result of the doctrine of reconciliation, as is the case in Orthodoxy, and also with the majority of the positive theologians of recent years like Kähler or Schlatter or Althaus. On the contrary this ultimate aim of Jesus' struggle must provide the central content for the whole interpretation of the Cross. Everything else that we have to say by way of explanation must be subordinated to this leading aspect.

Or what Christ, and under His guidance the first Christians, said regarding Satan is deception and mythology. There is no such opponent of God. The idea of Satan is merely a symbolic expression for certain mass-effects which have come into being through adding together many individual decisions by many autonomous individuals. Then we should not allow the devil to appear in the drama of redemption even as a mere cipher. In this case only two parties encounter one another in the



reconciliation of the world, between whom a settlement is reached: on the one hand the holy God, on the other side a number of individuals who have transgressed against God's commandment.

In the Church's doctrine of reconciliation it was above all Origen who undertook to explain Christ's progress to the death on the Cross as a battle with Satan, that is to say as a dethroning of the prince of this world. But this idea became discredited owing to the repulsive mythological form in which the overcoming of Satan was pictured in the ancient Church. Under the disguise of His human form the Son of God was thrown out as a bait to entice the devil to attack Him. In doing so the devil unexpectedly met with the superior power of God which destroyed him. But this mythological misrepresentation was only one reason why the connexion with the devil became discredited in the Church's doctrine of reconciliation. The deeper reason for its rejection is found in the fact that to our human thought the reconciliation becomes obscure if we have to regard it as a final battle between God and Satan. For our mind can never fathom the "depths of Satan". That in a world in which God works all things there should be a will that wants to destroy God, is, as we saw, to our minds a Gordian knot which we cannot undo. We are restlessly thrown to and fro between the two statements which our reflexion can never unite. One is: God is the sole agent, even in the devil. For without this certitude we cannot pray and trust in God. For without it God's power would be limited by an opposing power whose victims we might become at any moment. But the other is: God must have no part in the diabolical rebellion. For if God Himself receives diabolical characteristics, then He can no longer call us to account when we have taken part in the demoniacal rebellion.

Neither of these statements must be soft-pedalled in favour of the other. Our reflexion must bleed to death from the open wound of this contradiction. This contradiction also becomes visible in our practical life. Whenever we see the satanic before us in tangible clarity, when we remember what has happened during recent years, we are thrown to and fro between two attitudes. Either we cannot find any connexion between God the Father and all that happens here; we feel that God's

mortal enemy raises his head here and seizes hold of the saints of the Highest. Or we bring the satanic events into connexion with God and venture the astonishing thesis that the devil is always God's devil. Then we are in God's hand even during torments at the hands of satanic persecutors. But we no longer understand God. We do not understand how the Father can allow His children to be tormented like that. We can only bow under the inscrutable counsel of God. In practical life too we therefore always come to the insurmountable barrier which in the present era prevents our insight into the ultimate depths of Reality. We have some idea of the unsearchable depths of God and of the depths of Satan. But if this ultimate cosmic contrast remains inscrutable to us then we can never entirely fathom its solution. Only if we knew how the knot is tied would we also be able to understand how it can be undone. This is an unsurmountable barrier to our understanding.

After all that has been said it is only too understandable that most theologians have avoided interpreting the life-work of Jesus as a battle with Satan. They were rightly afraid that this might make the act of reconciliation a mystery inaccessible to our reflexion and the attempt to describe it might lead to a fantastic mythology as was the case with Origen. Nevertheless we can understand neither the temptation of Jesus nor His agony at Gethsemane if for fear of this danger we ignore the serious fact that forms the background of the New Testament narrative of the Passion: the issue in the work of reconciliation is not merely a settlement between God and the disobedient individual. Something far more difficult and terrible is at stake, viz. the overcoming of the diabolical power, the mortal enmity to God which becomes visible as the sinister background behind every deceit and every attack of rage. It is a good thing for us that we do not look down in the abyss into which we fall at every sin. "Blessed are we that we do not even know how deep this abyss is."<sup>3</sup> With our guilt we fare like the "ride across Lake Constance". Not until we have got across safely, saved by God's mercy in Christ, do we notice how bottomless was the depth across which we have come on a thin layer of ice. Not until we have first received forgiveness

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *Credo*, Zürich 1935, p. 70; in the Engl. trans. *Credo* by J. Streathearn McNab, London 1935, p. 78, this passage has been rendered inaccurately. Tr.



does it dawn on us that guilt consists in our having taken one step after the great misleader who stirs up the world against God, and that this step cannot be undone. We have thereby landed in a state of fatal dependency. For if we want to collect our courage to set ourselves free from him then he mockingly shows us the unclean pictures of our past which we can no longer erase from our memory, the entries which he has made carefully in our account-book and through which we are beholden to him. The New Testament calls Satan the "accuser" who "accuses" us "day and night" (Rev. xii.10). He has a tremendous quantity of incriminating material at his disposal. The dossier in which he collects this material is continually increasing. That gives him a claim on us. He has only to pick at random from his dossier and at once we are undone. Only this makes us realise what guilt actually is. Guilt is not merely a transgression of commandments, which disturbs our communion with God. It is something far more terrible. We are in bondage to Satan because of our debts. On account of our guilt<sup>4</sup> we have come under the power of the great accuser and prosecutor of mankind. When he opens his account-book and asserts his claim on our whole life, then we are reduced to silence.

<sup>4</sup> In German *Schuld* means both "debt" and "guilt". Tr.

## CHAPTER 7

### *The Equipment of Christ for His Work of Reconciliation*

WE HAVE SPOKEN of the purpose of the act of reconciliation, and of the opponent with whom the Redeemer had to come to grips. But now the next question is: what kind of equipment did the Redeemer need if He was to be capable of fighting the battle to the end which aimed at taking Satan's claim on us from him? Recent theologians have examined by psychological empathy the inner conditions which led Jesus to His decision to die for us. They say more or less that His death was sonship. He gave His life to the Father. This is shown by His words at the hour of His death: "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." The moral greatness of Jesus is shown above all by the fact that even in the pain of death He still loved the men who caused Him all this suffering, and prayed for His murderers. That is how in His forgiveness God's forgiveness came to light. All this is perfectly true. Even if we regard the death of Jesus from a merely moral point of view, it makes an indelible impression upon us and shows us how even at the very gates of death a man can overcome all bitterness against his enemies. But this greatness of soul is not only found in Jesus. Socrates too remained true to the very last to his love for his people who condemned him and to his reverence for the laws of the state according to which he was condemned.

This remaining true to love even under dire torment is also a characteristic of some figures of Buddhist legend. Prince Kunala, the story tells us, was loved by one of the queens because of his beautiful eyes which were as fair as those of the bird Kunala. As he did not return her love she gave a command under the Great Seal that his eyes should be put out. When the order had been executed and he was told that the queen was responsible, Kunala said gently: "Long live the queen! She has taken away my eye of flesh that cannot be replaced but I have received instead the immaculate eye of wisdom!" Or we



can take an example of this heroic love of the enemy from our own times. During the First World War Sir Roger Casement, the champion of the liberty of Ireland, was sentenced to be hanged because he had entered into correspondence with Britain's enemies. The night before he was hanged he left a note in the prison, in which he had written: "My goodwill to those who have taken my life, equally to those who tried to save it. All are my brethren now." This overcoming of the desire for revenge by a deeply-rooted fraternal love has therefore been found more than once in human history. The men who achieved it have been widely admired. But that does not mean that their death had redeeming power for others. If the apostles believed in the redeeming power of the death of Jesus then the reason must have been something other. The accent of the apostolic preaching of the Cross was on something quite different. The decisive thing is not how badly Jesus suffered and how He bore His suffering. On the contrary the power of His death depends on the inner authority behind His mortal suffering.

What was the inner condition on which everything hung? What gave this suffering world-redeeming power? This at once becomes clear when we realise that the issue in this Passion was not only mediation between God and disobedient mankind. Christ had to encounter the satanic power. When Jesus prepared Himself for this battle and called upon His disciples to proceed with Him to the final frontal attack, saying: "Rise, let us go hence", He made a remark which shows us with lightning-like clarity what kind of equipment He needed in order to venture on this battle. "The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me" (Jn. x.v.30). That is to say: he has no claim on me, I offer him no point of attack, I have no Achilles heel where his arrows can injure me. Why can none of us attempt the battle with the satanic power? Because we all offer this power a vulnerable spot which makes it possible for it to strike us down before the battle properly starts. That is the incriminating material in the hands of the accuser which gives him a claim on us. Before this enemy we are all disarmed in advance. Before him we are all reduced to silence because we all need forgiveness. We are all unclean before God.

The battle for a fortress could be decided by one single man

if this man were shot- and sword-proof, that is completely invulnerable so that the enemy could not touch him. This man would be able in the midst of a rainstorm of hostile bullets to climb the wall and to enter the fortress through the breach. The others would merely have to follow him. Similarly the battle against the great accuser of mankind can be decided if there is One who can quietly go through the satanic cross-fire that wounds and fells all the others, without the enemy being able to touch him with the weapons at his disposal. After all, in the battle which is fought here Satan has only one weapon at his disposal. That consists in the trespasses of which he can accuse us. In the battle that is to lead to the redemption of the world there is no question of physical power or intellectual superiority – the question of power will be decided later – but as in a heated battle which is fought in a court of law, lasting and fluctuating day after day, the only point at issue is guilt or innocence. The mortal missiles which can be used in this battle can never be anything else than demonstrations based on actual fact which prove the guilt of the accused. If therefore there is One who can encounter Satan without guilt, then He is *a priori* victorious in this battle. For all the arrows which the enemy may take from his quiver must ricochet off Him without effect.

Therefore the whole success of the act of atonement is entirely and solely dependent on Christ entering pure into the great battle which we all have to fight. "Through the eternal Spirit" He "offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb. ix.14). Everything really does depend on this point. He who is perfectly clean and has never fallen away from communion with God, He is the only really strong One in the battle that is fought here. He is absolutely superior to the whole world, to death and to all hostile powers, even though He is mocked and insulted by all and perishes in outward misery. If this is true, then the first thing that is all-important to our salvation is, that this strong One is there, who has not, like all the rest of us, found the way home to God through conversion, through repentance, through a break with a solid past – otherwise the accuser would *a priori* be victorious over Him as he is over us – but who, on the contrary, was with the Father from the very beginning of His life and had not for one moment fallen away



from communion with Him. Everything for us depends on whether it is true, what He says about Himself according to John's Gospel: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn. iv.34). "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn. v.19). I "speak thus as the Father taught me" (Jn. viii.28). "As I hear, I judge" (Jn. v.30). This unceasing entering into the will of the Father, undisturbed by anything, in which all that He willed came from the Father and returned to the Father, as the blood in unceasing circulation comes from the heart and returns to the heart, that is Christ's sonship of God. In it alone lies the authority for reconciliation and the ability to meet Satan in superior strength. According to the testimony of the New Testament this resting of the will of the Son in the will of the Father did not come into being at a particular point of time. Its origin can be traced back beyond all time to eternity. The Prologue of the Gospel according to John speaks about this in the present tense of eternity: He who "is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" to us (Jn. i.18). But even if we can trace this sonship of God back to eternity, yet we can discover nothing in it other than the wonderful relationship of two wills. The will of the Son rests in the will of the Father. But at the same time this rest is the eternal movement in which the will of the Son consecrates itself to the will of the Father, as a stream which at its mouth unceasingly pours the full content of its water into the sea.

Since the earliest times of the Church human reflexion has attempted to reduce this relationship of volition to a metaphysical relation of being. For involuntarily we seek for an explanation, as from our own experience we cannot understand such undisturbed communion with God. Admittedly, as we saw in *Jesus the Lord*,<sup>1</sup> it is altogether possible that a man, within the ordinances of the present world, in space and time, and in the organic necessities of sexuality, of dying and having to kill, should yet remain in God all the days of his life. "No one who abides in him sins" (1 Jn. iii.6). For if this were not possible, if the fundamental forms of our existence were unclean in themselves, then we would be excused by the circumstances in which we were born for our loss of communion with God.

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 137-43 (124-8).

The guilt for which we need reconciliation would then not be guilt but just fate. It is therefore certainly feasible for us to conceive in theory of the possibility that a man in the depths of desperate suffering as well as on the heights of intoxicating joy of life should perpetually rest in the bosom of the Father. Yet because of our practical experience we simply cannot imagine that this could really be the case anywhere. We cannot imagine that someone entirely innocent should be dishonoured and tormented for hours on a cross without any feeling of resentment arising in him against the God who allows such a thing to happen. We cannot imagine that any man can stand in the midst of the storm of all the passions which break forth from the depths of a strong natural constitution without the heavens ever clouding over him and without ever being thrown out of his prayerful conversation with the Father. We therefore involuntarily seek for an explanation of Christ's pure and undisturbed sonship of God. But any explanations which we attempt can only ever consist in tracing the stream back to the source and the source to the dew from heaven, the water of which has been gathered on the mountains. We can merely trace the unity of volition between Father and Son back to the beginning of the life of Jesus upon earth, and then beyond this beginning to eternity. But thereby the miracle is not explained, it is merely back-dated.

In this sense the New Testament witnesses speak, though very reticently, of the miraculous birth of Jesus, in virtue of which He was outside the atmosphere of sin from the first moment of His existence. For if He really was to be no use to the accuser, then it would not have been sufficient for His life to be consecrated to God, say, only from the moment of His baptism. His whole past must have remained without blemish. This life therefore must have started in a manner entirely different from our own. But the sonship of the Redeemer was traced not merely to the beginning of His earthly life. Paul (Phil. 11) and John (ch. 1) disclose the transcendent backgrounds of this miraculous birth by speaking of a heavenly state of existence in which as the Son He was in communion with the Father before He came down to earth to become our brother.

These indications in the New Testament have given rise to



christological speculations on the two natures of Christ. But through all that the Church has taught in this connexion we should not allow our eyes to be distracted even for one moment from the one point that is alone decisive for our atonement. For the strength of Christ's work of atonement, which we all need in the hour of death, the only point that is really relevant is that He whom God "sent to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn. iv.10) should enter into the battle entirely undefiled. But the purity of a sacrifice never consists in a mode of existence independent of any decision. The way of life, the natural disposition, the constitution with which a man enters the world, always merely relate to the situation within which he has to make his decisions, and not to the decision itself. If the issue here were not guilt and atonement but the question of power, then the mode of existence would be of the utmost importance. For a man can in many cases obtain power without his own interference, through receiving an inheritance if he is, for example, the crown prince of an hereditary monarchy or the heir to a fortune of millions. But when it is a question of guilt or innocence, then the constitution which is my lot without any effort of mine is irrelevant. It is merely part of the circumstances under which I have to make my decision; it has no connexion whatsoever with the decision itself.

The Epistle to the Hebrews therefore, which places the atoning authority of the great High Priest of mankind radiantly in the middle of its message, has given us the clearest and most unmistakable witness that the sacrifice of Jesus to death had nothing whatsoever to do with a mode of existence which favourably distinguished Him from us. It took place under exactly the same conditions in which we fight the battle of our lives and have become guilty. He has "in every respect been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. iv.15). "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb. ii.18). That is to say, to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews it is all-important to make clear that whatever this equipment of Christ for His life's work may have been, it had no effect on the decisive act by which Jesus placed His will in the Father's hand. Here He stood like a private soldier in the same trenches as ourselves and fought under the same conditions. Again and again theo-

logians have tried to qualify the clear statements of the Epistle to the Hebrews in honour of Jesus. They say, for example, that the temptation at Gethsemane did not, as is the case with us, consist in a reprehensible picture of the will coming before His eyes. The wicked desires of other people did not attract and tempt Him. The disciples' fear of suffering did not cause His battle. In His case it arose from an essentially human desire which is pure in itself, the desire to escape from suffering. This pure desire too had to be sacrificed to God (Schlatter). Bornhäuser in his sensitive essay on the Temptations of Jesus according to the Epistle to the Hebrews says, to the same effect, that in Jesus' case the attitude prompted by his suffering cannot be described as sin. If Jesus had taken the other way, if He had chosen pleasure, still He would not have sinned. His whole temptation therefore took place "apart from sin".<sup>2</sup>

If any such explanation were right, then Jesus would precisely not have become our Brother who followed the same path as ourselves along the precipice, but without slipping. Then Jesus would *a priori* have been out of danger. We could then compare him to the son of a landowner who because of a socially-minded outlook and love of the farm labourers gets up at four in the morning and shares in the work all day. If then after a day of fatiguing labour he is strongly tempted to stay in bed the next morning and to sleep in, then it is certainly laudable if he resists the temptation and pulls himself together. Yet the workers will not regard him as their brother. They feel clearly that his temptation is something different from the temptation which they themselves suffer. Tolstoy describes how as a boy, sitting on the driver's seat of a coach, he developed his social ideas to the coachman. But to all his arguments the coachman always had only one answer: "you are a child of the aristocracy!" Why cannot the labourer accept the child of the aristocracy as his brother if the latter is prepared to take all the hardship on himself? Because his temptation is determined by other conditions than his own. When the workman is overcome by the need of sleep and does not come to his work, then his whole existence is in jeopardy. He may be sacked the next day and his family will bear the consequences. But the child of the aristocracy is safe. However heroic his fight against

<sup>2</sup> K. Bornhäuser, *Die Versuchungen Jesu nach dem Hebräerbriefe*, 1905.



his fatigue, ultimately his complete devotion is merely sport and game without mortal danger. His temptation takes place in the sense of Bornhäuser, "apart from sin". The deep earnestness which characterises the narrative of the temptation of Jesus, which we can ever read only with inner trembling, lies precisely in the fact that everything is at stake here. One is reminded of a poem by Stefan George:

*Wie man zurücksieht nach dem Klippensteg –  
den man nur einmal heil durchmisst, nie mehr –  
nachdem man jedes Tritts Gefahr schon kennt – :  
so schauerst du bei dem, was dir gelang –  
als ich in deine Hände mich befahl –.  
Sie leichter, mürber, und ich war zerschellt.*

(As one looks back upon the cliff path – which one measures only once alive, no more – when one already knows the danger of every step – : thus thou shudderest at what thou hast achieved – when I commended myself into thy hands –. Had they been weaker, softer, I would have broken.)

Very near the path of life which Jesus had received as His task from His Father, only one step removed from it, was the road of political-religious power over the masses which Mohammed chose. The slightest concession in this direction and all the world would have applauded Jesus. His whole life was a journey along the edge of this precipice. All the time they wanted to drag Him over it. They wanted to make him King. They wanted to spread the fame of His miracles. Even His own disciples were in this respect His greatest danger. That is why again and again He had to retire from all men, even from the disciples, into the solitude of the mountains, in order to be alone with the Father. Only from a distance can we enter into what happened to Him there. But every man who has a great task on behalf of his fellow-men has to go past the same precipice. His friends are often his greatest danger. But the temptation becomes even more serious at Gethsemane and on the Cross. In the terrible hours when the great darkness came down upon Him, He was suspended between heaven and earth. The whole weight of the world was dragging Him down and attempting to break the link which tied His soul to the Father above. If the connexion had broken, if He had rebelled against

the Father, then He would have fallen away from God, and we with Him. Then all would have been lost for ever. Christ could in fact have fallen from communion with the Father. Otherwise the agony at Gethsemane would have been a piece of theatre. It is not as if He could have avoided the Cross without any danger to Himself, and could have chosen eternal rest for Himself. If the Father had really sent Him to atone for our sins then it would have been the deepest guilt which anyone could ever incur if He had given in to the temptation of choosing pleasure instead of the Cross. That holds good even if, as Schlatter says, the will to decline suffering is not sinful in itself. Sleep too, for example, is not sinful in itself. It may even be a duty. Yet in the serious circumstances of war it is a capital crime to sleep on duty while looking out for the enemy. Jesus therefore was in danger of falling "like we are". When the young man called him "Good Master!" Jesus said, according to Mark: "None is good but God alone" (Mk. x. 18). That is to say He distinguishes between God's goodness and His own. *God's* goodness is beyond the battle. One cannot fall away from that. But Christ assumed our flesh, that is to say the mode of existence in which decisions are made which are on the edge of the abyss of the opposite possibility. The purity of Christ therefore was not a purity outside the battle, but purity within the battle, a standing in the storm of the temptations, a being shaken by all winds, without yielding or swerving for one moment.

Summing up what has been said, we have arrived at a conclusion which may perhaps make access to Christ Himself easier for many people who do not know what to do about the Church's doctrine concerning Him. We shall not comprehend the final metaphysical background of the sonship of Christ until eternity. It is concealed from our eyes. But what we have to hold to now, as men who hasten toward death with heavy hearts, is a fact that everyone who has a conscience can understand as a matter of course. Our Redeemer consecrated His life to God as a sacrifice without blemish. He stood in the battle as One who was pure. Unlike all priests and fathers confessor of all the great religions, He does not need forgiveness Himself before He can forgive others. He need not, like Prince Sakyamuni, make a break with His past in order to return to



God. He alone needs no second birth. Therefore He is the only One who is immune against the attacks of the accuser, the deadly effects of which we all experience in the face of death. In the shining armour of the undisturbed sonship of God He went to meet the enemy before whom even heroes must tremble. For this is in fact the first impression which every reader of the Gospels receives: this life is still covered in the fresh dew of the dawn of the world. His parables, the manner in which He dealt with children and spoke to women have a touch of unspoiled childlikeness. When we see a mountain-top with fresh snow shining against the blue sky we are reminded of Him whose enemies had to be silent when He said: "Which of you convicts me of sin?" He alone could eat with publicans and sinners without becoming Himself unclean. He could touch lepers without being infected. For He offered the evil enemy no point of attack.

## CHAPTER 8

### *The Content of the Act of Atonement*

WE HAVE SPOKEN about the opponent with whom Christ fought and about the equipment He needed for the battle with this opponent. In what then did the encounter with the opposing power consist? What was needed to lift the burden of the guilt of the world and to silence the accuser in our breast? This question leads us into the inner sanctuary of faith in Christ. Theological reflection on this question so far has always moved in the two directions which are indicated by the names of Abelard and Anselm. In those two directions we are shown once more at a higher level the contrast of the two ways by which we men can attempt to help ourselves. They are the two ways which we discussed in the preceding volume.<sup>1</sup> As we saw there neither way leads us beyond the reach of the polar world. They therefore give us only a foundation of life which we have to maintain by our own effort. One way is a return to the state of indifference which lies behind all the contrasts of the world and which we can reach by philosophical speculation or mystical contemplation. The other way is idolatry. This consists in regarding as Absolute some earthly reality, that is to say some point in the indefinite series of relative values, and raising it to an ultimate value behind which we must not ask any further. These two attempts repeat themselves on a higher level in respect of the reconciliation of Creator and creature. That is how the two types of doctrine of the atonement come into being which have long confronted one another as Abelard's and Anselm's type of doctrine. The ultimate roots of Abelard's type of doctrine of the atonement, though they are not very prominently noticeable, lie in the religion of indifference, that is to say in the idea that it belongs to God's essence to be beyond the opposition which mankind raises against Him. In its purest form this

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 45ff (34ff).



thought appears at a much later time in Hegel's speculative doctrine of atonement. Even in its negation the absolute spirit remains identical with itself. God therefore in Himself is reconciled to Himself even in His contradiction. Christ therefore cannot have gained this reconciliation by the struggle of His life and death. On the contrary, what happened at Golgotha can be no more than the revelation or announcement of something that is certain in itself apart from any history. This speculative root then produces the cool rationalist thought which in manifold forms is found in the whole of recent theology: the suffering and death of Christ is not the execution of our reconciliation, the decisive battle in which the die is cast in respect of our eternal destiny. What Jesus did and suffered is rather a dramatic and impressive display in which God shows to all mankind how He is disposed towards us sinners, how terrible sin is in His eyes and yet how He has mercy on every sinner who returns to Him with a penitent heart. "The Cross is an overwhelming announcement of God's love which in face of sin, under the most terrible suffering because of sin, holds its own as unqualified love and thereby wins our unshakeable confidence."<sup>2</sup> That is to say the issue is not an objective question but merely the subjective problem "How forgiveness could be made credible and beneficial to man." Of course there can be no doubt that the Passion and death of Jesus has this effect. When we see how the ecclesiastical and political authorities give the only One who went through life undefiled, into the hands of a ruffianly, drunken gang of soldiers, how they torture Him to death and in the process mock Him, then we discover in a shattering manner the abysmal depth of human baseness. And when Christ, as Schlatter says, in spite of His murder, holds to fellowship with the world and His disciples, and even prays for His murderers, then we guess the power of His supra-human love, then "God's forgiveness becomes visible in His forgiveness".<sup>3</sup> But the question is whether this appearance, this display of God's unchanging disposition towards the sinful world is merely an additional effect of the crucifixion of God's Son or whether the actual meaning of the Cross is confined to this. In the latter case we

<sup>2</sup> Paul Althaus, "Das Kreuz Christi", in *Mysterium Christi*, Berlin 1930, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Das christliche Dogma*, 2nd edn., Stuttgart 1923, p. 292.

have not been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus. On the contrary our reconciliation rests on the essence of God as it is in itself, independent of the Passion and death of Christ. Christ did not die in order to accomplish the reconciliation of the world with God. The atonement is there as a supratemporal reality, entirely independent of any historical fact. God is *a priori* exalted above any human guilt. Before his death, looking back on a wasted life, every man can say without further ado: *Dieu me pardonnera, c'est son métier*: God will forgive me, that is His job. Christ died merely to tell and demonstrate this eternal truth to us.

This view is shattered by the reality of the story of the Passion as told in the Gospels. If one reads the story of the Passion only from the point of view of a revelation of God's love and forgiveness, then one cannot help wondering: was this "baptism" of which Jesus was so afraid till it was accomplished (Lk. xii.50), was this deepest humiliation and dishonouring of the Son of God before all the world really necessary if God wanted merely to give graphic instruction on His mercy? Why did God need blood if His only concern was to demonstrate something that was already a fact without this blood? Do not all the hints which Jesus gave His disciples before His Passion show that the issue here was infinitely more than a demonstration, that here a decision was made in which the destiny of the whole world was at stake? Under the impression of the Passion of Jesus we are made to realise that if we sinful men think that the forgiveness of sin is an inevitable consequence of God's essence, and that therefore the crucifixion of Jesus was only a demonstration of this inevitability, then we have trespassed beyond our competence. After every serious lapse our conscience tells us that the god of the state of indifference or of the forgiving love, from whom we have deduced the forgiveness of our sins with so much ease, is a product of our own reflexion in which our frightened conscience finds no rest. Here again, as in all the forms of the idealist doctrine of atonement we have ourselves forgiven our own sins indirectly by means of a self-created idea of God.

Guilt seems to be taken more seriously in the other form of the doctrine of atonement which, as contrasted to Abelard's, is connected with the name of Anselm. Here too, as with



Abelard, the two parties, the holy God and sinful man, confront one another. But Christ is not, as in Abelard's form, on the side of God, as God's instrument of revelation to influence men. On the contrary Christ is on the side of sinful men and as their representative influences God. Either, as with Anselm himself, He gives by His death – of which, being sinless, He was not guilty before God – a satisfaction which God can accept as a propitiation for the guilt of men. Or, as in old Protestant orthodoxy, He vicariously takes on Himself the punishment which God, according to His righteousness, was bound to impose because of our sins, and thereby makes it possible for God to temper justice with mercy, that is to say to have mercy on us without injuring His righteousness. Here the work of atonement becomes a giving of satisfaction or a criminal procedure, that is in both cases a transaction made between God and mankind, of which our reflexion can see the necessity. Althaus is right in saying: "the old theory sees the guilt, it also witnesses to the impossibility of human satisfaction. But it has no sufficiently radical understanding of guilt and God's holiness: it does not realise the total impossibility of any satisfaction at all. On the contrary it maintains the equivalence of our guilt before God and the satisfaction by Christ."<sup>4</sup> Though quotations from Scriptures are used to prove this, yet the giving of a prescribed satisfaction or the payment of an accountable penalty has an entirely different character from the death of Jesus in the Gospels, over which hovers from the beginning to the end like a thundercloud the fatal seriousness and incalculability of the decisive battle of a great war. For a battle in which life and death are at stake is substituted a transaction in a civil court, in which the judge and the accused come to an understanding according to the fixed rules of procedure. All this is possible only because God is made into a Being whom we men can influence by means of our representative, to whom we can give or do something to make Him change His mind and to pacify Him. But that is possible only with a limited power with whom we can have dealings on an equal footing on the level of this world. To the eternal God who works all in all His creatures cannot give or do anything that were not already His before, not even by means of a representative. For we belong to Him

<sup>4</sup> Althaus in *Mysterium Christi*, p. 251.

for all time with all our strength and energy. In these orthodox doctrines of atonement therefore man seeks to lay hold of God by making Him equal to himself, by making Him into a man-like being whom we can fathom and whom therefore we can influence because of our knowledge of His qualities (righteousness and mercy).

We therefore see that both interpretations of the atoning act of Christ, Abelard's and Anselm's, remain within the field of the idea of God which we men can make for ourselves. They remain within the limits of polar thinking. Both lack the silence before the supra-polar mystery of the crushing and yet so beatific omnipresence of God. We can comprehend this omnipresence of God only as far as it is disclosed by the Son who alone knows the Father. Only the Son therefore can tell us about what happens at the supra-polar level. What he tells us about the meaning of His death goes infinitely beyond both Abelard's and Anselm's argument. He shows us that His agony is not merely a graphic way of teaching by which God demonstrates to us in an impressive manner His forgiveness which is there independent of that agony. Neither is it a transaction which God concludes with us men as His partners and insolvent debtors in order to reach an agreement. The decision which takes place in the death of Jesus is made on the supra-polar level. It is a decision between God and the opposing power that wants to dethrone Him. For the rebellion against God to which we are all accessories, consists in the first place in our not having fulfilled God's law and our having transgressed against many of His commandments. But God's commandments are always expressions of His total claim on our life. The will therefore which breaks forth in disobedience to God's law is ultimately directed against the majesty of God Himself who is behind those commandments. God must be destroyed. We do not want Him to reign over us (Lk. xix. 14).

In the battle which breaks out as a result one party is the satanic hatred of God which we experience so manifestly when we read the Passion of Jesus in the Gospels, this most powerful drama of all history. On the other side is the wrath of God at the rebellion aimed against Him. Again and again in the New Testament the term "God's wrath" occurs in this connexion. Paul can summarise the fruit of the death of Christ in one



phrase: we are saved from wrath through Him (Rom. v.9). Christ is the One "who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1. Thess. i.10). We are all "by nature" "children of wrath" (Eph. ii.3). "Who does not obey the Son," "the wrath of God rests on him" (Jn. iii.36). Like a thundercloud in which electrical energy is gathered for a great discharge, so the wrath of God hangs over unredeemed mankind. In the last days the "golden bowls full of the wrath of God" will be poured out over the world (Rev. xv.7).

"Scripture therefore holds the opinion that every single sin is something so terrible in God's world that God cannot answer it by anything other than his wrath. 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.'"<sup>5</sup> Luther is right: Sin is not such a small and easy matter as the world, feeling safe, may dream and imagine it is, for the word sin "contains within itself the eternal wrath of God together with the whole realm of Satan".<sup>6</sup> According to Luther the importance of even the smallest human sin can be measured properly only by God Himself against whose will it is directed. Every sin is a "deep abyss . . . indeed as great as He who was insulted by it". Every sin therefore is a denial of God. We notice this, for example, from the fact that immediately when we do not rectify a lie straight away our soul gets into a benighted state in which we no longer experience God's presence but feel only God's wrath. That every single human sin has this infinite importance, is to be understood only if more is at stake than the transgression of individual commandments. Every untruth, every word by which we hurt someone else is an outbreak in our heart of the destructive will against Him whose total claim on our life lies behind every one of His commandments. That is why according to Luther the "satanic sin" is the sinister background of every human sin. We realise that particularly if, as Luther always did in accordance with Scripture, we distinguish between Adamitic and satanic sin. According to Luther, human sin, regarded by itself apart from

<sup>5</sup> Paul Althaus, "Das Kreuz und der Böse" in *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*, xv (1938), p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, Weimar Edition (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. C. F. Knaake, Weimar 1883-), VOL. XL, PT. II, p. 84.

its sinister background, is merely "unbelief and disobedience", not yet conscious enmity against God. But therein man, without as yet realising the consequences of his decision, has been deceived by a power and has put himself as an instrument at the disposal of this power which from the very beginning desires nothing other than the destruction of God. As distinct from this satanic power man continues to have two possibilities within himself. As Luther says in *De servo arbitrio*, he is like a horse that can be mounted either by God or by the devil. He can be an instrument of either power. He is "man in contradiction".<sup>7</sup> That is why man himself cannot contribute the least thing to his salvation. He has not the power to turn and to become an instrument of God. But the possibility of his turn and repentance does exist. It is different with Satan. His essence excludes this possibility, his nature is mortal enmity against God. He is, as Luther says, "God's eternal enemy, who eternally accuses and curses God and excuses himself; it is impossible that he should be able to say with his heart: Lord I have sinned, forgive; he cannot cease from sin, enmity and blasphemy" (on Gen. III.13). According to his nature he is "an everlasting fire of hatred and envy of God" (sermon on Jn. IV.16-21, 1534). Through the first sin which he committed man has fallen under the spell of this diabolical revolt against God, but without realising in advance the import of his decision. After the fall therefore "Satan and man are not subject to the same judgment although man has fallen into sin owing to Satan" (Luther). Satan cannot be converted, he can only be eternally damned and destroyed. Man can turn because his hatred of God does not belong to his nature. But in spite of this necessary distinction between the deceiver and the deceived, Luther regards satanic and human sin as forming a unity. In respect of God the creature's sin is always only *one*, "which at all places is and does *one* thing". For it also has only *one* originator, Satan whose proper work it is and who has brought the whole human race into his power and has mixed it up in his own fate.

If God has to deal not merely with a great number of disobedient individuals, if on the contrary the systematic power of a satanic will rebels against Him, then we realise for the first

<sup>7</sup> Emil Brunner, *Der Mensch im Widerspruch*, 3rd edn., Zürich 1947.



time what God's wrath is. Even in our own life we distinguish wrath from minor defensive movements which we make every day whenever something is disagreeable or disturbing to us. Such minor things can do no more than annoy us. But wrath does not flare up until we meet with an opposing will which aims at destroying that which is the very centre of our existence. We men therefore cannot burst out in wrath in the final and absolute sense of the word if our existence is threatened with destruction, because we have only a limited right to exist that has been forfeited through guilt. God can be wrathful. For He has an absolute right to exist. That is why the Apostle refers to God's wrath simply as *the* wrath (Rom. v.9). We feel that we are subject to "the wrath" as soon as we raise our hand against God. And we suspect with terror what would happen if it came to a final decisive battle between the two powers which here confront one another, between the holy wrath of God, which is aimed at God's mortal enemy, and Satan's concentrated hatred of God which mobilises all the powers of hell against God. For Satan too has a "great wrath" (Rev. xii.12), because he regards God as his mortal enemy.

The awful silence of the Accused in the two nocturnal sessions in the palace of Annas and Caiaphas and the final procedure before Pilate before an enraged crowd whipped up by invisible agents, was shrouded in an atmosphere of high tension which was hardly bearable for men. It was as if at the tensest moment of a wrestling match two rivals of gigantic strength in confused entanglement hold each other with an ultimate exertion of all their powers until one of the two falls to the ground. This picture of the wrestling-match forced itself on Calvin when he said in respect of Christ: "He had, so to speak, to fight at close quarters hand to hand with the armies of the underworld and the terrors of death everlasting."<sup>8</sup>

And Luther in a drastic picture compares the devil to a beast of prey which assails a defenceless lamb in order to devour it, when he says in a Passion sermon in 1534: "Our Lord has given the tender little lamb into the devil's jaws; that is why he has thoroughly set his teeth in it and thinks that he is going to devour it. But he will have to leave it without being able to devour it."

<sup>8</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutio religionis christianae*, II.xvi.

Let us reflect for a moment on what had to be settled in this incomparable fight if it is really true that in all sin a satanic rebellion against God Himself flares up. Let us try to demonstrate by weak human parables – inasmuch as there is anything to demonstrate here at all – what it means when the wrath of God collides with the whole world's hatred of God. As long as we think that God's divinity is not touched by sin at all, that God's majesty remains unaffected by any human guilt, we are still without any understanding for the agony of Jesus, the description of which takes such a large place in the Gospels. For we cannot see here any problem at all that had to be solved. For sin is like a cloud which has come between the sun and myself. Beyond the cloud the sun continues to shine in everlasting splendour. And as soon as the cloud disappears the sun shines again as it has always done. In plain language: I need only repent of my sins and immediately the whole relationship between God and myself is good again. Sin has left traces only in myself, not in God. If there is to be forgiveness of sin no settlement between God and myself need take place. Reconciliation is found in this: that from everlasting to everlasting God is above all sin. But the whole state of things is entirely different if in fact sin is not merely a disturbance on the human plane which leaves God untouched, but a rebellion of the creature against the Creator. Then God encounters in sin a second personal power whose nature it is, to be "an everlasting fire of hatred and envy towards God". If it is ever to come to a solution of the contrast which has to be settled here, then we can only understand this solution if we start from what we know from our human experience as regards the relationship which exists between person and person.

There are certain elementary laws (*Urgesetze*)<sup>9</sup> which come into force whenever a conflict has arisen between two persons. There are certain rules according to which such a conflict may be settled. These rules differ according to the type and character of the conflict in question. Let us start from these elementary laws which can come into force on the occasion of a settlement between persons and let us attempt from there to approach the dark mystery in which Gethsemane and Golgotha are shrouded. The simplest conflict between persons is the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. p. 3, note 1.



fight for power and money and landed property in which men confront one another as opponents. This conflict can be solved according to a simple rule. That is the right of the strongest. The opponents have to measure their strength in an honest fight. The one who comes off victorious from the fight dictates the conditions of peace according to which the respective claims are henceforth limited. But it cannot have been such a struggle for power which was decided in the Passion and death of Jesus. For before Jesus gets ready for the battle He renounces any use of force. He refuses to call upon the twelve legions of angels which the Father could put at His disposal. He tells Peter to sheathe his sword and not to offer any armed resistance. A second conflict between persons which has repeatedly been quoted to get to an understanding of Jesus' Passion is a lawsuit. Herein two men encounter one another as legal persons one of whom has accused the other before the court of a breach of law. This contest is settled by the judge according to applicable laws of justice. But the contest which is described in such an unforgettable manner in the story of the Passion has by no means the character of a court case in which a judge who is above the parties makes a decision according to the paragraphs of statute law and imposes a penalty which is then paid. God is not just the impartial judge. God is one of the parties. He Himself is the offended party whose whole wrath bursts forth.

We therefore see that what happened here can be understood neither as a contest for power, nor as a legal contest or criminal procedure. But these two forms of contest do not even exhaust all the possibilities known to us from our human experience. There is a third conflict, the most difficult one that can arise between person and person, a conflict to which our attention has been drawn again lately through research in ancient Germanic customs. The abyss which can come between two persons does not reach its final depth until it has become impossible to bridge the abyss either by the physical test of a fight or by legal means. This is the case when one has offended against someone else's honour. It is difficult to grasp the meaning of the *original* word honour and to circumscribe it by other human words. A man's honour is not a position of power. A man can be robbed of his power, he can lose his life but of his honour

no one can rob him. And a man can be at the height of power and outlive all his competitors – and yet be a man without honour. Honour is more than life. Neither is honour the right which a man can claim as a “legal person”. Honour is more than all that can be defended by legal means or lost by a judicial penalty. That is why in certain cases a criminal is condemned not merely to death but also to loss of honour. This touches him even more deeply than execution. Honour is the innermost value of personality. It is, if one be allowed to put it like this, the metaphysical element in man. Therefore there is only one attack which really does touch man’s very heart and affects his innermost being. That is an attack on his honour. An abyss is opened between two men, which can no longer be bridged, if one has defamed or dishonoured someone else, if for example by a disgraceful ill-usage or derision a man has been publicly robbed of his honour or if a woman or a maiden has been robbed of her feminine honour. In all the higher races the class of free men, especially the nobility and the warrior caste, had regulations of honour expressive of the elementary laws, which came into effect whenever someone’s honour was offended. The damage that is done when someone “cuts off” someone else’s honour is so deep and severe that “satisfaction” cannot be achieved by a demarcation of claims of power. Neither can the conflict be settled by a decision in court. The rules of contest in the Icelandic saga, the code of honour of the officers of the old German Army, the *Bushido* of the Japanese equestrian caste all come unanimously to the fundamental conviction: if someone has robbed someone else of his honour, then it is impossible for the two opponents to continue to live together within human society. There must either be a duel with fatal issue in which one is destroyed; or if for some reason or other this is impossible, then the only possibility left to the dishonoured man is *harakiri*, solemn self-destruction executed with all the necessary religious ceremonies. For not to be is infinitely better than any existence without honour. If therefore a man has taken away someone else’s honour, then there is within the framework of our earthly existence no way out of the conflict that separates the two opponents. The only way left is the way into nothingness. The iron rigour with which in serious cases of conflict the code of honour of all



higher races demands the unqualified destruction of human life makes us realise that in respect of the relation between person and person there are *original* ordinances which are so strict and inexorable that even the need of life and influence may be subordinated to them and that hecatombs of precious, irreplaceable human lives must be sacrificed to them.

If we seek a human parallel by which we can demonstrate – as far as there is anything to be demonstrated here at all – what was the issue in the terrible contest which in the Passion and death of Christ was decided between God and the anti-godly power, we have to start from this code of honour in which the most serious conflict which can arise between persons becomes apparent. Anselm of Canterbury in his book *Cur deus homo*, perhaps under the influence of ancient Germanic *original* views, did not start from constitutional laws to render the suffering and death of Christ humanly comprehensible, like the later early Protestant theologians, but from the code of honour. God's honour according to Anselm consists in this, that all that exists beside God exists for God. God is God only if all things belong to Him, if therefore nothing in the universe happens against His will. Then only is God's honour safeguarded. If therefore anything anywhere in the world withdraws from God's will, if anything anywhere happens against God's will, even if it is merely an unclean look which a creature casts somewhere against God's will, then this is an attack not only on the power of God or on His claim on us, but it is attempted murder of God Himself, an attack on God's divinity, on God's honour. Luther too says of Adam: "He stole God's honour and took it for himself."<sup>10</sup> But if God's honour has been touched, then the case has arisen that between human persons leads to an insoluble conflict, in which even amongst men the attacked and the attacker cannot exist and remain alive together, from which the only way out consists in destruction.

Only now can we get at least some idea what it means when Christ, as the New Testament says, places Himself as the "mediator between God and men" (1 Tim. II.5), between the two powers which here confront one another, in order by standing between them, to sustain the mortal collision. This collision is not the collision of two powers whose contrast can

<sup>10</sup> Luther's *Evangelienauslegung*, ed. Mühlhaupt, Göttingen 1938, vol. I, p. 199.

be measured according to the law of physical strength. The Mediator therefore cannot be compared to a man who places himself between two trains in order to sustain their collision, and who is crushed by this collision. But neither is this collision a legal contest in which a legal arbitrator as a mediator and honest broker places himself between the contesting parties by accepting the bad feeling that is usually connected with any such attempt at reconciliation. The battle in which Christ places himself as a Mediator between the conflicting powers is so fierce, the contrast is so abysmal, that no mediation is possible at all. The existence of the one party fighting here means the non-existence of the other and conversely. In this battle therefore he who places himself in the middle between the contestants must exercise at the same time two functions which to our thinking seem incompatible.

On the one hand Jesus is on the side of the fallen human race, whose fate He has taken on to Himself. By this He takes unto Himself the destroying judgment of God's wrath, which is directed against the whole human race that has made itself available as an instrument of the dark power that assails God's honour. This is the element of truth in the theological thought that Christ in the hours of His God-forsakenness on the Cross had taken on to Himself the sum total of all the punishment of hell that we have deserved through our transgressions, or that He had become one with our consciousness of guilt and in those terrible hours experienced the pains of a bad conscience, which for every one of us is caused by our sins. The mistake of this fantastic thought is merely that the incalculable number of isolated human transgressions has been substituted for the unified satanic will present in us all with which Christ was fighting. But those transgressions are only the many effects of a rebellion which in itself is one. And Christ came to wage war against this homogeneous personal power. By standing up to the pain which was the result of the conflict between light and darkness He put himself under the wrath of God which is poured out over the rebel.

But this is only one side of the picture. As the Mediator who places himself between the two conflicting powers He is at the same time on God's side. He exposes Himself to the world's whole hatred of God, to the whole attack of the satanic power



which has the aim not merely of limiting God's power and taking away His claim but of robbing Him of His very godhead and dishonouring Him. In this way both are found together in Christ as the Mediator: on the one hand His being under God's holy wrath which is discharged against the rebel who has assailed God's honour, and on the other hand His suffering under the fiery rage of the world which aims at dishonouring both God Himself and Him who comes in the name of the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

After all that has been said, to understand the meaning of the Passion of Christ is therefore ultimately not a matter of our systematic penetration. It rather depends on how heavily the guilt which we have on our conscience weighs on us. As long as this appears to us to be no more than a "little cloud" which only momentarily hides the sun of God's fatherly love from our eyes while in reality this love is shining on us in unchanged splendour, we shall be unable to appreciate the agony of Christ at Gethsemane. The Church's doctrine of the atonement in all its forms from Anselm to Luther then seems like a "myth of the scapegoat", that is to say a spiritual heritage from Judaism which is foreign to our character, though men who know Judaism have continually pointed out that a Messiah who allows Himself to be crucified without offering any resistance is something unthinkable to the Jewish mind in particular, and that Mohammedan tradition concerning Jesus, which is mainly drawn from Jewish sources, eliminates the Crucifixion as something unbearable, and assumes that someone else, perhaps Judas, was mistakenly substituted for Jesus and was crucified in His stead. But so long as the inner condition for an understanding of the Passion and death of Jesus is lacking we simply must have recourse to some such explanation from comparative religion in order to explain the *theologia crucis* by which men like Luther and Johann Sebastian Bach have lived. This under-

<sup>11</sup> The concern expressed by Paul Althaus in his essay on the Cross and the Evil, One ("Das Kreuz und der Böse", *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*, xv (1938), pp. 165ff, in contrast to my doctrine of the atonement as put forward in the first German edition of this work, has, as far as it is justified, been taken into account in the second edition (cf. the note on pp. 286ff of the 2nd German edn.). For further details I must refer to my discussion with Althaus in the article on the main types of the doctrine of the atonement, "Die Haupttypen der Versöhnungslehre", in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1938, pt. iv, pp. 304ff.

standing does not dawn on us until, perhaps in the face of threatening death, our eyes are suddenly opened to the fact that sin which had seemed so innocent to us has a sinister weight that drags us down into the fathomless abyss of farness from God. Then we realise that we are subject to God's wrath because we have taken part in the total war that is waged against God. Only if we know by our own experience what it means to be forsaken by God, if in our prayers in deep distress we call out into the night in vain, do we suspect that what happened in those last fighting days of Jesus is our own history. In this bloody decisive battle the wrath of the holy God against the conspiracy in which we are involved bursts into a terrible discharge. In his "Sermon on the meditation on the sacred passion of Christ" (1519) Luther says that this is the centre around which all our thoughts on the passion of Christ must move:

"Those meditate aright on the passion of Christ who look on Him in such a way that they are afraid in their hearts and their conscience becomes thoroughly faint-hearted. This alarm should be caused by your seeing God's serious wrath and unchanging earnestness confronting sin and sinners: for even to His own beloved Son He would not release the sinners until the Son had made such compensation for them as He had said through Isaiah (LIII.5): 'For the sins of my people have I smitten him.'" – "I thought I was secure and need not worry about the judgment that had been pronounced on me in heaven, until I saw that God's only Son has mercy upon me, comes forth and subjects Himself to this judgment for my sake. Alas, there is no more room for jesting and feeling secure, if there is such an earnestness behind it."<sup>12</sup>

Here and also elsewhere Luther emphasised that all the doctrines of satisfaction which we construct and accept about the death of Jesus do not bring us one step closer to what happened. For only this experience of God's wrath upon our guilt opens up to us the mystery of the Passion of Christ. But we cannot attain to this experience by our own strength. As night-birds are blind by day, so we live in a blissful blindness regard-

<sup>12</sup> Luther, Sermon on the Passion of Christ, 1519, Weimar Edition, vol. II, pp. 137-8, 139; *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Clemen, 2nd edn., Berlin 1950, vol. I, pp. 156-7.



ing our real condition and do not see the fathomless precipice down which we fall with every unclean mental image. God alone can take the veil from our eyes: "It is impossible that the Passion of Christ could be thoroughly reasoned by ourselves, unless God gives it into our hearts."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> D. S. Merezhkowsky, *Tod und Auferstehung*, trans. A. Luther, Frauenfeld 1935, p. 298.

## CHAPTER 9

### *The Distinction between the Passion and Death of Jesus and the Death of a Human Hero*

WE HAVE SEEN that under the influence of the experience of God's wrath the ultimate meaning of the Passion and death of Jesus dawns on us. But if we see what is characteristic of the death of Jesus then we also realise what distinguishes it from every other heroic self-sacrifice that has occurred in history. If we read the report of the Gospels on the last days of Jesus, then it strikes us immediately that at the critical moments Jesus offered no resistance to the mortal attack of the priests and the authorities. It would have been easy for Him to gather the large following that applauded Him when He entered Jerusalem into a fighting organisation so that He could have resisted the threatening attack. Evidently this is what His opponents too had expected. Otherwise the priests and elders would not have sent out "a great crowd with swords and clubs" (Mt. xxvi.47) against Him, or according to John's Gospel an entire cohort, equipped with torches and arms (Jn. xviii.3) as for a night battle. But the police found Him with only three disciples in the garden. When Jesus allowed Himself to be taken prisoner without resistance, it was to be expected that He would at least have defeated His opponents during the legal procedure by the superior arms of his Spirit. From His disputes with the Jewish scribes we know the extraordinary repartee by which He knew how to deal with His enemies. But now, as everyone is waiting for his *apologia*, He persists in an invincible silence regarding all accusations, in an incomprehensible passivity.

How can this remarkable behaviour be explained? It can only be understood, if the battle which is fought here has a character entirely different from any terrestrial contest for power. This is not a contest between two limited powers measuring their strength on the level of the polar world. In



every contest which can be fought with heroic effort within the territory of this earth, whether it be a duel between two individuals or a war between nations, one opponent attempts to gain as much territory from the other as he can. He wants to force him on to his knees or to bring him to surrender. But here in the contest between God and Satan two supra-polar powers meet one another, each of whom can exist only by claiming the whole of Reality for himself. In this battle therefore there can be no surrender, no compromise, no peace, but always only an either-or. Either the one power is "all in all", or the other power fulfils all things and has all things in hand. In the "strange war" into which Christ enters there are only two possibilities: either Christ allows Himself to be entirely destroyed by the ruler of this world, or the ruler of this world is entirely destroyed by Him so that Christ is victorious on the whole front. According to the report of the witnesses these two possibilities are fulfilled successively in His death and resurrection. The first comes to completion in the death of Christ. He allows His whole existence to be entirely destroyed by the satanic power. The second possibility becomes a glorious reality in the Resurrection.

We now understand the issue of the inner agony which preceded His Passion. He wrestled to gain preparedness to allow Himself to be defeated and destroyed by the ruler of this world without offering resistance, in the certitude that behind this destruction was the victory which God alone can bring about. The agony at Gethsemane is the completion of the battle which Jesus had fought before His public appearance, in the "temptation". The "great and crafty spirit", as Dostoevsky called him in his interpretation of the story of the temptation in the "Grand Inquisitor" wanted to entice Jesus to use the miraculous power which as the Son of God He had at His disposal as a regular instrument of war in order to maintain Himself against all hostile powers. For the temptation is always: "If you are the Son of God", you need not be hungry; "if you are the Son of God", you can risk the jump into mortal danger for angels will carry you in their hands; "if you are the Son of God", all the kingdoms of the world are yours. The fundamental attitude to which the devil wanted to entice Jesus would *a priori* have precluded the possibility of Jesus being prepared

to allow Himself to be captured and overpowered by the hostile powers without resistance when the Father so ordered. Jesus would then certainly have been able to do works of power and acts of healing, and to raise the dead in the name of God. But Christ would no longer have followed the Father when the latter gave Him the infinitely more difficult task, at the critical moment to desist from the use of His power and to allow Himself to be bound and taken away defenceless while in full possession of divine miraculous power. The enemy would then have succeeded in driving a wedge between the will of the Father and the will of the Son. The Son would then have been severed from the Father. He could then have used His sonship of God to save and enrich His own life. If this attempt had been successful then Jesus would perhaps have been able to conquer half the world and to climb higher and higher on the ladder of fame. But at the hour when He was surrounded by the police during the night in Gethsemane He would have said: No, I am not the Son of God to go this way; I have not received this boundless power so that I should end my life as a criminal. In His fight against the tempter Jesus had victoriously resisted this temptation. He had wrestled through to the fundamental readiness to use or not to use the power which He had at His disposal only in dependence on the Father. But not until now, as the police really came to bind Him and to take Him away did the preparedness have to be translated into the deed, the preparedness which fundamentally Jesus had gained at the beginning of His career. At the end of the story of the temptation it says in the Gospel according to Luke: "The devil . . . departed from him until an opportune time" (*ἄχρη καίρου*, Lk. iv.13). Now, in the night of Gethsemane, this time had come and the battle with the tempter had to be brought to a close. The contest therefore for which Christ was preparing Himself had nothing to do with human heroism. On the contrary it was precisely a renunciation of the heroic resistance which would have been fitting to meet an adversary belonging to this world. What was needed now was the readiness to let Himself be destroyed. The Cross is "the weakness of God" (1 Cor. i.25). "The rulers of this age", that is to say the demons, the tools of the prince of this world "have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii.8). This weakness of God is shown



not only in the physical destruction of the Son of God but above all in the destruction of the most sacred, the last thing that a man can have left even in the deepest defeat, viz. his manly honour. For the satanic attack is directed not only against God's power and God's right but against God's honour. God himself and His cause must be dishonoured before all the world through the dishonouring of the Son of God.

We ought to remember what it means when the oldest report which we have about it says: "And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, 'Prophesy!' And the guards received him with blows" (Mk. xiv. 65). By the sound of the blows with which they covered the bound man it was to be made manifest before all the world that the whole life of this man who had again just solemnly called himself the Son of God was nothing but a fraud. The man who had said that He would return on the clouds of heaven was standing there as an unmasked impostor, a criminal cast off by God and man. Is there a "deeper dishonour of God" than this scene? The soldiers of the Roman imperial power throw a red-purple cloak round His shoulders, take a thorn-branch from the heap of firewood and put it on His head as a crown, put a sceptre of reed into His hand, bend their knees before Him and greet Him: "*Ave rex Judaeorum!*" Is there a more devilish mockery of the claim of universal dominion of the Son of God? If only He had put the jeering soldiers in their place by a word of authority that touched their conscience! But by bearing even with this, with the very last, He gives up the last remnant of His manly honour.

One characteristic of His Passion shows us particularly clearly that Jesus was handed over to the satanic power. We know also from the persecutions of Christians at all times that wherever in the world the diabolical hatred of God finds expression, killing is not enough. The satanic rage of destruction is not satisfied by the faithful being beheaded, stabbed or shot. There must be torture as well. Sadistic cruelty, intoxicated by lust, breaks out of the hidden depths of the human subconscious where even in civilised people it still continues to live as a repressed instinct. This is what Nietzsche means by the terrible saying: "To see suffering does one good, to cause suffering even better." Why is the invention of ever slower

and ever more refined tortures an inevitable concomitant symptom of the satanic hatred of God? The faithful are not merely to be disposed of. Nor is it enough to take away their honour. The whole power of resistance of their soul is to be worn down by driving them to insanity. For Satan, because he claims God's omnipotence, wants to be victorious on the whole front and to crush all resistance. Therefore it is a definitely satanic inspiration which incited the hysterical mob to demand that Jesus should not be beheaded but crucified. His flesh must be torn to pieces by the *flagellum horribile*, the scourge with inserted pieces of bone and metal. Then, nailed on the cross He must die slowly. In this way the last in Him that still holds to the Father must be destroyed, ground down like flour between millstones.

If we reflect on the Passion and death of Jesus, as set before our eyes in the Gospels with unsparing realism, then we see that this death has nothing to do with human heroism, though people have attempted again and again to praise the death of Jesus as an heroic death. Varied are the enemies against whom Jesus is supposed to have fought His heroic contest. Some have said "Jesus was the first worth-while opponent of the Jews", he was killed in a battle to liberate mankind from Judaism. Others asserted that the priesthood was the enemy whose victim Jesus became; He fought for the freedom of God's children against the legalist tutelage of a domineering priestly caste. The latter therefore disposed of him as a "blasphemer". There is no doubt that this battle against priestly religious coercion and Jewish pharisaism was an aspect of Jesus' work. But the final drama of the life of Jesus in which the whole battle of His life comes to a decision lacks precisely the characteristic of human heroism. For we expect of a hero that he will sell his life as dear as possible and that he will continue fighting till his last breath, like a sailor in a naval battle who still fires a last shot at the fleet of the enemy while his ship is sinking. That is how Socrates availed himself of the examination before his judges, in order to destroy them intellectually and to make them the accused before he became their victim physically. If Jesus had fought an heroic battle for the freedom of God's children against the Jewish priestly caste, why then did He not make full use of the legal proceedings, in which He was called



upon to defend Himself, to strike a final blow against His enemies, to settle with His judges thoroughly and to bring them into the dock? Why that painful silence that could not but make the impression that He had nothing to say to the accusations?

Only two explanations are here possible: either we measure what happened by the norm of the ideal of human heroism. We must then arrive at the same judgment as Celsus and Porphyrius: "When he prays that this cup may be removed from him, then this is unworthy not only of a son of the gods but even of a simple philosopher who holds death in contempt" (Porphyrius).<sup>1</sup> "A miserable death concluded a despicable life" (Celsus).<sup>2</sup> Or it dawns on us under the impression of the story of the Passion that there are not only terrestrial heroic battles in which men and nations measure their strength. There is a battle which is beyond all those heroic battles, a battle on the result of which it depends whether the battles which are fought in the world have an eternal meaning or only temporal importance. This battle is infinitely harder than all the battles which the heroes of all races and all times have fought. This battle is on another level than all the wars, duels and Olympic games of world history. It is the battle against the power of darkness which has a claim on us all. An entirely different consecration was needed for this battle than for all other battles on earth. It would have been easy for Jesus to fall on the field of honour at the head of His courageous disciples in a daring attack on the Roman cohort that came to take Him prisoner. But the battle which He had to enter demanded more than this heroic death. It demanded precisely the renunciation of this last instrument of human self-preservation. In His prayer at Gethsemane Jesus was not wrestling to gain preparedness to suffer physical death. Something much more terrible was at stake. He, the pure One who had always remained with the Father, was wrestling for readiness to be delivered entirely passively, with tied hands, renouncing all heroic resistance, to the satanic hatred of God which released all the powers of hell against Him. Confronted by the heavy burden of this unbearable task which the Father had given

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Makarios Magnes, *Ἀποκριτικὸς ἡ μονογενὴς πρὸς Ἑλλήνας* III, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Origen, *Κατὰ Κέλσου*.

Him He began to be "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mk. xiv.33). He said to His disciples: "My soul is very sorrowful even to death." That is to say, He would rather die a thousand times than take this on Himself. "Remove this cup from me!" He prayed the Father. He could not understand that the Father should wish to inflict so much on Him. The great preparedness had come, the victory had been gained when He came to His disciples for the third time and said: "It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. xiv.41).

Jesus always sums up what awaits Him in an entirely passive expression. He calls it a submersion in water, that is to say a baptism. "I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I constrained until it is accomplished" (Lk. xii.50). "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" (Mk. x.38). At the time immediately before His death He continually refers to the fate that awaits Him by the one passive expression "being delivered up" or "being betrayed" (*παράδοσθηναι*). "Rise," He says after the prayer in Gethsemane when He urges His disciples to move on, "let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand" (Mt. xxvi.46). The two men in dazzling apparel who meet the women at the tomb after His death once more remind them of this important word of Jesus: "Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified" (Lk. xxiv.6-7).

Jesus knows that no man can follow Him on the way into this terrible experience. "You will all fall away" (Mk. xiv.27). He says this without any reproach but with deep sorrow. And what He says here to His disciples is valid for all men at all times. None of us sees into the depths of God and into the depths of Satan. That is why we cannot understand and why we cannot bear it that the Son of God should sacrifice Himself without resistance. So long as God Himself does not take the veil from our eyes we have to measure the death of Jesus by the norm of a human heroic fight. But then we are offended and turn away. Yet it is true what Mersezhkovsky says when he depicts how the sound of the hammer that drives the long black nails through the hands



and feet of the Son of God becomes audible: "And heaven and earth and hell were listening. Such sounds had never been heard in the world and will not be heard again till the last trumpet of the archangel. . . . We are not listening and yet we hear it. For the ear of man was created in such a way that it must hear the knocks of this hammer."<sup>3</sup> Wherever someone reads the story of this death on the Cross, there somehow the question awakes in him, whether maybe the Crucified is not the One for whom our conscience is instinctively waiting when it hears the voice of the accuser, whether after all the final battle has not been fought here, which is over and above all the heroic fights in history, the battle for the entry to God's heart which we have closed through our guilt.

<sup>3</sup> Merezhkovsky, *Tod und Auferstehung*, p. 298.

## CHAPTER 10

### *The Illustrative Interpretations of the Work of Atonement*

ALL THAT has been said so far has shown that we cannot by our reflexion comprehend the mystery of the death of Jesus. More strongly than anywhere else we experience here the ultimate antinomy of reality by which our intellect bleeds to death, the inextricable Gordian knot which comes into being through the two *original* truths which we may not harmonise: God who is all in all works in Satan too, "the devil is God's devil", and the second *original* truth: God is not responsible for the satanic counter-action, otherwise our share in the guilt of this counter-action would lose its seriousness. These two *original* truths must keep each other in balance like two scales on which there is an equal weight. We are standing with both feet in Reality only if we bear the high tension between these two truths without any attempt at levelling them up. All the doctrines of the atonement developed by theologians and philosophers have been human attempts to solve this high tension arbitrarily. They have disturbed the balance between the scales and put the heaviest weight either on one or on the other side. Either they started from the first *original* truth, the sole agency of God even in the satanic rebellion, and dropped the second *original* truth, the inexcusability of the satanic rebellion. Thus the act of atonement became a mere demonstration. Gethsemane and Golgotha lost the seriousness of a decisive battle. Everything became a dialectical game in which God placed His own contrast outside Himself in order to assume it into Himself again. Or they started from the second *original* truth and dropped the first. Then a dualistic comprehensive view arose. Satan met God as an equal opponent. Thereby the act of atonement became a pagan myth in which two limited powers come to terms with one another. God's wrath is mollified. God is pacified by the payment of a satisfaction or by the sacrifice of a scapegoat. God thereby



again becomes a limited power within this world in the sense of pagan polytheism, one who has to hold his own against a limited opposing power. We forget that God is God only if He is all in all.

The witnesses of the New Testament have left no doubt that in the act of atonement too God remains the sole Subject. This becomes most clear in Paul's tremendous statement that comprises the whole antinomy of the message of atonement: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. v.19). In the whole process God remains the One who is acting. Thereby all the mythologies of a scapegoat collapse. Yet the whole event is not a process only within God. The Creator is confronted by a cosmos which has rebelled against Him and which therefore cannot be perfected before atonement has taken place. We cannot by our human thinking see these two sides in one picture, however much we try. We cannot find one formula which would express both God's sole agency in the work of atonement which entirely excludes all Jewish and pagan mythologies, and the abysmal hatred of God which He settles here in a terrible manner. But as often as someone approaches death with a burden on his conscience and reads those chapters in the Gospels which in the simplest words narrate the greatest tragedy of world history, then he feels in his conscience that the terribleness of what happened here corresponds with the terribleness of what burdens his conscience. His conscience will become silent only if he accepts what happened here in faith as something that happened for him.

If the inner content of the work of atonement remains an unsearchable mystery to our reflexion then all the ceremonial and legal interpretations of this act of God which have been attempted since the days of the Apostles are no explanations but merely descriptions of an inexplicable fact. How do these illustrative interpretations arise? Why are they a necessary expression of what we owe the Crucified? We understand this only if we have realised that it is not the question of power but the question of guilt that is the ultimate cosmic problem with which all nations have wrestled. If we consider the great religious and legal institutions which the civilised nations have created in the light of the act of atonement then we see that ultimately they all circle around one great question of all man-

kind. Their theme was the tragic conflict that is the centre of all the tragedies of world literature, the fact that guilt once it has been incurred cannot be undone but continues as irresistibly as an avalanche and brings damnation to the individual and to the community. Forms of worship and legislation attempt somehow to unravel this knot. They want to deliver the individual and the community from the curse of the crime. As guilt is a metaphysical business the two offices have existed side by side from time immemorial, the priest and the judge; and both, from time immemorial, have worn the long gown, the fluttering cloak which indicates symbolically that they are surrounded by a divine halo.

The need for a priest is something universally human. Everyone whose conscience has been awakened looks for someone before whom he can unload, confess and abreact his burden. Nietzsche compares the priest to a rapid stream that washes away the dirt of the soul. In countries where the Roman confessional is still a public institution there are fewer suicides than where this impressive instrument for abreaction no longer exists. The same holds good of the judge and criminal procedure. The ultimate aim of punishment is not to re-educate the convict into a better man, though many prisons these days do successfully pursue this subsidiary purpose as well. Nor is the ultimate aim of punishment the humanitarian purpose of protecting society from dangerous people and acting as a deterrent to those who may have a criminal disposition. The proper and ultimate aim of punishment is entirely unrelated to all those educational and humanitarian subsidiary effects. It is expressed most simply by the words which the people are forever repeating: "There must be punishment!" "Justice must remain justice!" The wrong must be atoned for. The transgression demands expiation. It happens again and again in extraordinarily shocking cases, e.g. when a defenceless woman has been murdered by a sexual maniac, that the people, whose need of justice has not been met by public justice, have recourse to mob law to solve the unbearable tension which arises when a crime remains unpunished and to remove the curse which then remains on the whole community. The ultimate metaphysical meaning of punishment is thrown in particularly clear relief if someone, like Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's



*Crime and Punishment*, voluntarily puts himself at the disposal of the court, as he says himself, to "atone for" or to "expiate" his guilt, that is to say to be washed clean of it. For this he is prepared to pay the highest price which a man can pay for it, his life that has been forfeited through the crime. For our conscience tells us that the solution of guilt is even more important than life. It has therefore even been said that capital punishment is the "sacrament of the State".

Only if we start from this ultimate metaphysical meaning of all priesthood and jurisprudence can we understand why right from the beginning the Christian Church felt the need to express Christ's work of atonement in sacrificial and juridical categories, to say, for example, that Christ is the eternal High Priest who "by a single offering has perfected for all times those who are sanctified", or "upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole". This was not, as some have thought, a lapse from a purely religious way of speaking into Jewish sacrificial language or pagan mythology which we can no longer understand. Gerhard Kittel, basing himself on Jewish sources, has made it seem probable that the idea of a suffering Messiah who underwent our punishment, that is to say the application of Is. LIII to the Christ, far from being a Jewish element in early Christian witness, is precisely what Judaism from the very beginning has resisted most strongly because the Jew can only allow for a powerful Messiah.<sup>1</sup> Neither is there any question of a confusion of the religious with the juridical sphere. If we think that then we have not yet understood the ultimate metaphysical background not only of all religious practice but also of all the legal institutions of every nation. Only in the light of the Cross of Golgotha do we perceive the ultimate meaning of those primeval institutions of all human communities. For then we see that,

(1) Both priesthood and jurisprudence aim at lifting the curse which rests on the whole community on account of an evil act.

(2) In doing this, however, priesthood and jurisprudence reach a dead point which they cannot overcome by themselves: the act, once done, cannot be undone.

(3) This leads to an either-or. Either these institutions are

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Kittel, "Jesu Worte über sein Sterben", in *Deutsche Theologie*, VOL. VI, Stuttgart, pp. 166ff.

a fruitless attempt to lift the burden which the past has put on man's shoulders, or their meaning finds fulfilment in the fact that God has reconciled the world with Himself. In the latter case all these human creations are a shadow of the atonement wrought by God.

This is the point of view from which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews regards the priesthood of Israel. What he says about that in this respect holds good in exactly the same way of the priesthood in other nations. The aim of all priesthood is to "take away sins" (Heb. x.4). It wants to do away with, to delete and to invalidate past misdeeds which witness against us and have their evil effects everywhere in such a manner as if they had never happened; in the same way as one wants to wipe out the blood-stains on the floor-stones of an old castle, the silent witnesses of an assassination which has taken place in a feud between two clans, in order to make the deed forgotten. In this attempt all human priesthood reaches the dead point to which the Epistle to the Hebrews refers. Every human priest needs for himself the forgiveness of his own sin. He is "lying sick in the same hospital" as the patients who seek his help. He therefore has no real authority to take away the guilt. This is the experience of every father confessor and pastor to whom people come to get rid of the dirt of their souls. He himself is burdened too heavily to be able to take away other people's guilt. There are here only two possibilities. Either the priestly absolution is merely a human tranquilliser that lacks the endorsement of Eternity. Or there is Someone who Himself is in no need of forgiveness, who has offered Himself as an undefiled sacrifice to God. If this One exists, then He is the "eternal High Priest". His absolution is endorsed by Eternity. He is the fulfilment and the end of the priesthood of all religions. Since He is there, there is a place where burdened man can go to find forgiveness and peace even for a very old guilt. This eternal High Priest is the invisible centre of the whole human family. From Him as the centre the whole human community is flooded with the healing power of forgiveness. In virtue of His completed work of atonement real pastorate and real priesthood are possible as a "shadow" of Golgotha. Every searching talk between two people through which, for example, an unhappy marriage is restored, a lie is



admitted, an old feud between two families is at last buried, lives by the power of the blood that was shed on Golgotha. Only from there does all forgiveness between men receive the final sanction which gives it the power of Eternity. If this "yes" of eternity is lacking then two people may be able to suppress their hostile feelings and give each other the hand of reconciliation. But this forgiveness is backed only by weak human will-power. That is why it is never certain that the fire of hatred that continues to smoulder under the ashes will not suddenly burst into flames again.

What holds good of priesthood also applies to legal procedure. Punishment is an attempt to restore the order of justice that has been disturbed by a crime. But anyone who has done pastoral work among prisoners and men condemned to death knows that while the penalty, it is true, is a deterrent to others and protects society against bad elements, to the person involved it does not do the good that he had maybe expected. No human punishment is sufficient to wipe out the curse of the evil deed. Here too therefore we are confronted with two possibilities. Either the judgments pronounced by all the judges of the world are a gigantic but ultimately ineffective attempt to wipe out the blood-stains that mark the human race. Or an act has taken place which has really fulfilled the meaning of all judgments. There is Someone of whom it can be said in an absolute sense: "The chastisement was on Him so that we should have peace." As Atlas supports the celestial vault, so this One has borne the punishment that we men cannot bear. All human jurisdiction too is therefore in the shadow of the Cross of Golgotha. It lives, even if it is by no means conscious of this, by the blood that the Son of God has shed for us.

All sacerdotal and legal institutions therefore are illustrations of the work of atonement. This holds good also of the theory of satisfaction and the doctrine of the ransom. They are no explanations of the great mystery of the atonement of the world. They merely express the universal import of Jesus' deed. They are reflected images which the mystery of the death of Jesus casts in the mirror of these oldest institutions of mankind. But because the deletion of guilt is the ultimate aim of all these institutions, that is why it is necessary to illustrate the act of atonement by them.

## CHAPTER 11

### *The Vicarious Character of the Act of Atonement*

THE UNIVERSAL IMPORT of the atoning sacrifice which was expressed by all these illustrations holds good only on the assumption which we have made continually throughout the whole exposition: what happened at Golgotha is not merely a local historical event like the heroic death of Arnold von Winkelried or the death by fire of Giordano Bruno in the battle for the liberty of science. But by the death of Christ a decision has been made which has changed the position of the world once and for all in every respect. If, contrary to what we have tried to do so far, we regard as the target of the work of atonement not the satanic power but the total number of human individuals who are in need of forgiveness, then we shall need an additional explanation of the statement that the One who remained undefiled took on Himself the guilt of all. This statement seems to defy all morality. For we men can act vicariously for one another in nearly every other respect. One man can speak for another, as for example the lawyer who speaks in court for the accused while the latter remains silent. A man can work for someone else, as for example the miner who goes down into the mine for the sake of the others who warm themselves by the coal which he has produced. A man can give up his money to pay someone else's debt and become poor for his sake. A man can suffer and die for others as the soldier does for the women and children back home. Every true human community consists in each standing for all and all for each. It is a community of vicarious sacrifice. There is only one thing that people cannot accept vicariously for someone else, and this is the very thing that is at stake here: guilt. One person cannot become guilty for another. A perjury, a lie, a case of adultery is not a sum of money that can be transferred from one person's account to another's. A doctrine of atonement which maintains that is immoral. It undermines the



foundations of morality. The only solution theologians have put forward for this problem is to say, like Anselm in his doctrine of the atonement, that guilt is not in itself transferable but becomes transferable through a free decision of divine mercy: God accepts the death of the Son of God as a compensation and meritorious accomplishment which He adds to the credit of all other men.

This goes to show the difficulties which arise if the target at which the atonement is aimed is not seen properly. We can only understand why Christ, according to the witness of the New Testament, could say to His disciples on the eve of His death: "This is my blood for you, that is my body for you," if we see that the power which Jesus was to overcome in this spiritual combat was not the total number of many erring individuals but the gigantic self-sufficient power of God's enemy which, as we have seen, is present everywhere in a supra-polar manner. If we allow ourselves to be carried away by an unclean passion or if we commit a perjury to escape punishment, then this is not an isolated action against God's order which each of us undertakes on his own. But the anti-godly fundamental tendency which at all times is already present in the world is then released at a particular point in somewhat the same way as letting off a brake which keeps a railway carriage on a sloping track releases the force of gravity which was already drawing the carriage to the centre of the earth, so that it runs down unchecked and may cause unforeseeable damage. If therefore through His mortal battle Christ has taken away the claim on the world from this omnipresent power then an event of supra-polar import has taken place. This has cosmic import in the same way as the satanic rebellion. By this act therefore the whole situation is automatically changed at every point of Reality. Just as the will of hostility against God does not press us from without but wills within us, so also that new thing that we have been given in the atonement is not brought to us from without but is within us as a new possibility. Wherever in the world there is a man in the prison of guilt in which he has landed himself through his own participation in the great rebellion, there a door has now been opened through which he can escape. This objective possibility exists for all, as yet independent of their personal attitude.

This is why Paul can say: "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv.22). "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. v.18).

A new foundation has thereby been laid on which all men, even those who do not yet know it, can build their lives. The question which has kept so many theologians busy, viz. how the guilt of one person could possibly be charged to the account of another person, does not arise here at all. For no such transaction is necessary. In His battle Christ was faced with only *one* person in whom all other offences are comprehended, the satanic will of rebellion in which we are all comprised.

At first all this only makes it clear that the act of atonement of the One has a total character, "as one line that makes a thousand connexions". But in what respect has this effect a vicarious character? How far is One doing here instead of others what the others cannot do? To understand this we have to bear in mind what we said earlier about the equipment of the Redeemer for His work. We saw that the decisive battle between God and the opposing power could be brought to a decision only by the One who had remained entirely with God and who therefore did not offer the accuser any point of attack. We others cannot take part in that battle. For the accuser has so much material against us that already at the first move he could checkmate us, if we endeavoured to contest his claim on us. Only the One whose life was a sacrifice without blemish to God could attempt the fight with the dark power without being wounded by its arrows. He fought a battle in which, if we had attempted it, we should not have stood a chance. What He did we cannot do. That is acting by proxy in the strict, exclusive sense of the word. Althaus calls the vicarious work of Christ an "inclusive vicariate" because Christ through His vicarious deed lays the foundation of a new relation within us, empowers, liberates and compels us to new action, in the same way as it can be said about a mother that she who "vicariously suffers pain in her soul for a prodigal son wants to draw him to repentance through this suffering", or as it can be said of one "who watches vicariously over the danger and distress of his nation" that He "wants to draw them all into



this watchfulness".<sup>1</sup> It is no doubt true that Christ's deed sets into action an eternal motion within us. But we must not include within the vicarious work this effect which the vicarious act of atonement has within us. For the glowing, unending gratitude from which an abundance of new deeds in our lives is born originates precisely in the fact that Christ's work of atonement itself is for us a pure gift which we receive without having made the slightest contribution ourselves. It is precisely the exclusive character of His vicarious work for us that has that compelling power. When the burden of conscience, under which we have gone bent through life for years, has fallen from us, then as a matter of course our walk becomes lighter and more cheerful. But the new strength that comes over us when our conscience has been made free, the new swiftness which the boat of our life receives when it is refloated must not be regarded in any way as part of the act of atonement itself, not even in the form of saying that this act includes the obligation to a new attitude. The liberating power of what happened at Golgotha rests precisely on the fact that it includes nothing at all for us to achieve afterwards, that really the only thing demanded of us is what Luther wrote in 1516 to the worried Austin Friar Georg Spenlein: "*Igitur mi dulcis frater, disce Christum et hunc crucifixum: disce ei cantare et de te ipse desperans dicere ei: tu, Domine Jesu, es justitia mea, ego autem sum peccatum tuum; tu assumpsisti meum et dedisti mihi tuum; assumpsisti, quod non eras, et dedisti mihi, quod non eram.*" (Therefore my dear brother, get to know Christ, get to know Him as the Crucified, learn to sing His praise and to say to Him, while despairing of yourself: Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness; I am Thy sin; Thou hast taken what was mine and hast given to me what was Thine; Thou hast assumed what thou wast not and given to me what I was not.)<sup>2</sup>

It is all-important just at this point that we make a clear and unmistakable distinction between the question of guilt as the fundamental question of human life, decisive above everything else, and all other questions, even the question of the ethical attitude of which forgiveness makes us capable. With the newly granted power of will we are somehow able to make an active contribution to the solution of all other vital questions. But

<sup>1</sup> Althaus in *Mysterium Christi*, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> M. Luther, *Briefe*, ed. W. M. L. de Wette, VOL. I. Berlin 1825, p. 17.

the question of guilt is the only business for the completion of which we are condemned to complete passivity. We are here entirely dependent on vicarious action. This vicarious work is exclusive in a far deeper sense than any other vicarious action found among men. For in all cases of human vicarious action, like the death of a soldier at the front for his country or the vicarious economic output of the miner who works for us in the mines those who profit are at least merely passive only insofar as they accept the sacrifice indifferently or thoughtlessly as a matter of course. But in respect of what Christ does for us we are not even merely passively involved. On the contrary our contribution to the work of atonement consists in adopting a hostile attitude to it. That is to say we are actively involved in an opposite sense. This is the shattering fact which Paul (Rom. v.6ff) brings home to the Church. The incomprehensible greatness of God's love consists in the fact that we were reconciled through the death of Christ not merely "while we were yet helpless" or "while we were yet ungodly", but "while we were enemies". In a short, slightly obscure clause Paul contrasts this divine vicarious work with all human vicarious deeds: "Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man —: though perhaps for a good man (that is to say for someone whom one values) one will dare even to die" (Rom. v.7). This probably means that in all cases of human vicarious action, as for example when the Roman Curtius jumps into the ravine for his fellow-citizens or when in Schiller's *Burgschaft* a friend is prepared to let himself be crucified for his friend, the person who sacrifices himself and those for whom he does so are in some positive relation. Even if they cannot make any contribution they regard his suffering with sympathy and gratitude. But this is a different case. And that is what is incomparable about this divine vicarious work. Here Someone meets death for those who at the same moment at which He is doing so, dishonour and mock Him, and make a public spectacle of Him. That is as if in a shipwreck a man should jump into the water to save at the cost of his life someone who, filled with rage and hatred, continued to hit him to the very last. This is impossible among men. It is psychologically simply incomprehensible. But God "shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners" Christ "died for the ungodly" (Rom. v.6-8). The



Gospel of this supra-human and incomprehensible power of the love of the Father who so loved the world that he gave His Son for it, while in satanic hatred of God it wanted to destroy Him, that is the message which God's Church has to bring to the world. That is the precious, inalienable treasure of the Church. That is the ultimate support which every one of us needs in the hour of his death, when his own heart condemns him.

PART THREE  
THE WORLD'S PERFECTER



## CHAPTER 12

### *The Impossibility of Limiting the Mission of Christ to the Work of Atonement*

THE WHOLE PRECEDING SECTION dealt with a question the solution of which could not yet give rise to a serious collision with political and economic constellations. All the time the issue was only the one problem which thousands of people these days do not even see because it does not noticeably appear on the objective level; that is, the question of the solution of guilt. This question is entirely removed from the sphere in which the contest for world power, land and success is fought. Whether I go through life with a battered conscience or whether my conscience has been delivered may indirectly have a great influence on my outward demeanour. The authority with which I speak may depend on it. But on the level of the objective world this does not become apparent anywhere. For the states and changes which we indicate by the words guilt and innocence, burdened or unburdened conscience are all in another dimension which to the purely realistic politician does not seem to exist at all because it cannot be made visible. This dimension is the invisible relation in which at every moment I stand to God omnipresent, while at the same time I do affect the world or am made to suffer by it. In this respect the issue all the time is whether my deed connects me with God or separates me from Him, whether my action has the endorsement of Eternity even though maybe the world condemns me for it or whether Eternity says "no" to my deed even though maybe the whole world applauds me and congratulates me on my success. This invisible "yes" or "no" that God speaks to my deed produces no immediate change within the sphere of political and economic struggle for power. That is why it cannot come into immediate conflict with what happens on the level of the visible, tangible world. If therefore we could limit the work of Christ to internal events within our

conscience then a clear-cut separation could be made between the message of Jesus and the necessities of the political and economic struggle for power. In this way we should be able to avoid any dangerous collisions in advance.

From time immemorial this clear-cut division has been attempted. It succeeds if we eliminate from the message of Jesus all that according to the Gospels He said about the future of this world. For what He said about the ultimate destiny of this world inevitably interferes with the plans for the future and the aims of the powers of this world. For it refers to this same world in which we all work and struggle. That is why it disturbs the circles of world politics. Every prediction concerning the ultimate destiny of this world interferes with the plans of the world politicians in exactly the same way as the plans of a shipping company are disturbed when the weather forecast announces a serious storm in the Bay of Biscay through which the freighters of the company have to pass, or as the economic plans of a great industrialist are called into question when the doctor predicts that he is to die before long. The danger of a collision between faith in Christ and world politics therefore cannot really be avoided unless we manage to deny that the historical Jesus made any statements bearing on the destiny of this world, and to limit His mission entirely to what belongs to the imperceptible dimension and therefore applies only to the invisible events that take place between God and the soul.

This has been continually attempted since the days of German Idealism. The critical idealism with which the change in philosophical thought at the end of the eighteenth century began offered an extremely suitable scheme for this limitation of Jesus to the internal realm. It made a distinction between what is and what should be, between the eternal world of values and the temporal world of reality. As the stars are immovable above the waves of the sea in which they are reflected, so the eternal values are high above the changing conditions of the empirical world in which all things are relative and mutually determine one another. This idealist separation between the sphere of what is and the sphere of what should be was at the back of Harnack's mind, when he admitted that "this whole dramatic-eschatological apparatus in which Jesus



and His contemporaries lived cannot, it is true, be separated from all living religion", but said that this apparatus has nothing to do with the centre of Jesus' message. "Angels and devil, thrones and dominions are not the issue, but God and the soul, the soul and its God." "The individual is saved, not the nation or the state . . . this is the connexion in which Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God into which one attempts to enter by force."<sup>1</sup> But Harnack as an historian did not attempt to dispute that Jesus did expect the final cosmic drama. He believed only that it is possible to distinguish inner individual salvation as the original core of Jesus' message from the eschatological shell which He took from His contemporaries. The Lord's prayer was to Harnack simply joyful certitude in virtue of the possession of eternal goods.<sup>2</sup> The next step on this road was taken by dialectical theology in its original form. Here, as Folke Holmstroem observes correctly in his book *Das eschatologische Denken der Gegenwart*<sup>3</sup> the eschatological Jesus is misinterpreted as a timeless symbol of the existential Risk. Karl Barth says, for example: "Resurrection is Eternity. The moment when the last trumpet is blown, when the dead rise and the living are changed, this moment of time also is not its final moment but its τέλος, its un-temporal purpose and aim . . . the resurrection of Christ, or, which is the same, His second advent, is not an historical event."<sup>4</sup> In the second German edition of his *Römerbrief* the Platonic-idealist dualism between the unceasing flow of time and eternity unchangingly eminent above it is substituted more and more clearly for the distinction between the present age and the age to come. The *futurum* is an eternal future of which we know that it never was nor ever will be time. "Being the transcendent meaning of all moments, the eternal 'Moment' can be compared with no moment in time."<sup>5</sup> It is equally clear that Barth misinterprets the New Testament expectation as a timeless relation when he dismisses the burning longing for the second coming which continually led the early Church to the question "where is the

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, Leipzig 1903, pp. 36, 39, 41ff.

<sup>2</sup> Harnack, *op. cit.*, pp. 41ff.

<sup>3</sup> Gütersloh 1936.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Barth, *Biblische Fragen, Einsichten und Ausblicke*, pp. 94ff.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 2nd edn., Munich 1922 (more recent edns. published in Zürich), p. 482; Engl. trans. *The Epistle to the Romans* by Sir E. C. Hoskyns London 1933, p. 498.

promise of His coming?" (II Pet. III.4), with the following words: "Will there never be an end of all our ceaseless talk about the *delay* of the Parousia? How can the coming of that which doth not *enter in* ever be *delayed*? The End of which the New Testament speaks is no temporal event, no legendary 'destruction' of the world; it has nothing to do with any historical or 'telluric', or cosmic catastrophe. The end of which the New Testament speaks is really the End; so utterly the End, that in the measuring of nearness or distance our nineteen hundred years are not merely of little, but of no importance."<sup>6</sup>

This dialectical approach which as far as Barth is concerned has long since been overcome<sup>7</sup> has gained decisive influence with Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann in their interpretation of Jesus' words in the New Testament. Dibelius regards "Jesus' belief about the end" as the real motif of the whole Gospel. But the actual meaning of this belief concerning the end is merely "the judgment of time by Eternity", "the contrast between man's soul, life and fate and the Reality of God".<sup>8</sup> Bultmann's picture of Jesus is consistently eschatological. But he dissolves the "end-historical" element of the "old dramatic eschatology" and makes it into a mere "mythological expression" for something that is present at all times in the same way, viz. for the fact that at any moment man is in a position of decision for or against God.<sup>9</sup> Every hour is the last hour. In Lohmeyer's commentary on the Apocalypse<sup>10</sup> the Biblical expectation of the end becomes an "external work of religiosity", a mere symbol of the timeless absolute truth of the norms. Eschatology is the "pictorial 'end-temporalising' of timeless faith". The burning expectation of the end which Christ imparted to his disciples has thus been completely dissolved into a dialectical relation in which we have always stood and in which men will stand for ever.

But however radical these theses may sound, scholars of New

<sup>6</sup> Barth, *Römerbrief*, p. 484 (500).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, BD I, 2, 3rd edn., Zürich 1945, pp. 125-32, Engl. trans. *Church Dogmatics*, VOL. I, 2, Edinburgh 1956, pp. 113-20.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Dibelius, *Evangelium und Welt*, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Bultmann, "Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums" in *Glauben und Verstehen*, VOL. I, pp. 134ff; and by the same author *Der Begriff der Offenbarung im neuen Testament*, Tübingen 1924, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Handbuch zum neuen Testament ed. Hans Lietzmann)*, 2nd edn., Tübingen 1953.



Testament history have not ventured to take the final step which to us who want to place ourselves under the leadership of Christ would be the decisive step. They have not said that Jesus Himself did not live with the notion of the world to come, that He meant only a present responsibility when, for example, according to the earliest record He said to the bystanders: "Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mk. ix.1), a word which later Christians would certainly not have attributed to Him. Historians have always restricted themselves to saying that to Jesus Himself this expectation of the future was never the central point of His message but merely the contemporary form, the shell in which His preaching of repentance was contained. Bultmann, for example, says that if a man is placed in a position of decision and if this is what essentially characterises him as a human being, then it is always the last hour, and it is understandable that for Jesus the whole of contemporary mythology should have entered into the service of this understanding of human existence and that in its light He should have understood and preached His own hour as the last hour.<sup>11</sup> Lohmeyer says that these eschatological pictures therefore lose their rigid solidity and become a symbol and parable without losing any of their religious reality.<sup>12</sup>

But in all this they did not yet draw the final and most radical consequences of this Platonising of the message of Jesus started by Barth at the first stage of his theology. No one dared to draw these consequences until under the influence of National Socialism. Here for the first time the attempt was made to deny to the historical Jesus the whole expectation of the future attributed to Him in the Gospels as an overpainting derived from Jewish thought. This was done most impressively by Erich Winkel in his books *Jesus der Sohn* and the first volume *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, of *Das ursprüngliche Evangelium befreit von den erst nachträglich angebrachten Aenderungen und Zusätzen*. Though this product of the Hitler period now belongs to the past and is no longer taken seriously by any German scholar, yet Winkel's work should in this connexion be brought to mind.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus*, Berlin 1921, 2nd edn. Tübingen 1951, p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 96.

For it is a particularly typical example of where it leads when the first beginnings of a re-interpretation of the primitive Christian tradition of which we have spoken is consistently thought to the end by a man who has no exegetical inhibitions. Winkel gives us the following picture of the origin of the expectation of the Kingdom of God as we find it in the Gospel according to Mark. What Jesus meant by the word "Kingdom of God" was not an imminent consummation of the world but a condition of the soul. "The active state of peace and of being above the world by being entirely raised into the being of God in the βασιλεία θεοῦ, the dominion of God in which man is merely a point of transit for the divine will . . . this condition Jesus calls the 'Kingdom of God'."<sup>13</sup> "This 'Kingdom of God' is the condition of being in touch with God, the surface of the field where powers of God come into effect."<sup>14</sup> But "even the disciples of Jesus . . . in spite of their continued association with their Lord and Master" could "not set themselves free from the influence of this Jewish-political expectation which was in the air. After they had recognised that Jesus was the God-sent 'Anointed One', the 'Christ', they immediately attributed to him a claim on the royal throne of Israel, just as other people did; though Jesus again and again denied this claim and according to John's Gospel even declared: 'My Kingdom is not terrestrial.' Granted, to the 'thought of Jesus' there was sometime an 'end of the world'. But all that he says on the subject is that a last day will come without anyone knowing its time, surprisingly, 'as a thief in the night'."<sup>15</sup> "The tradition of the disciples was concerned about a judgment 'on the last day', but not Jesus." The historical core of the apocalyptic sermon which Jesus gave (Mk. xiii.1-37) before the city of Jerusalem is only a "bitter feeling and sad premonition concerning the city on the hills"<sup>16</sup> which was in fact to lie in ruins for more than two centuries. In their burning expectation of the judgment of the world the disciples inserted into this discourse the apocalyptic fantasies of the popular book of Daniel. The Gospel according to Matthew, which began the Judaising of the ancient Church, was the first to smooth and iron out the patchwork of the Synoptic Apocalypse.<sup>17</sup> Summing up it could

<sup>13</sup> Ernst Winkel, *Jesus der Sohn*, Kempen/Sylt 1935, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 133.



therefore be said that the Kingdom of God occurs in the Gospels in a double sense: "On the one hand Jesus' 'Kingdom of God' is a metaphysical quantity with very definite characteristics as described in the parables of the Kingdom . . . on the other hand it is an eschatological quantity according to the description in the book of Daniel. . . . What Jesus himself preached as the 'Kingdom of God' does not originate in the religious ideas of the Kingdom of God in Judaism. And those elements in the whole tradition of the religious understanding of the Kingdom of God that can be traced back to the Jewish view were not spoken by Jesus."<sup>18</sup> The result of his inquiry into the text is summarised by Winkel in the new German edition of the Gospel according to Mark in these terms: "This detailed evidence of the alterations in the manuscript has destroyed the strongest support of the postulate that the references to the last judgment, the second coming of Jesus and the part he is to take in it were spoken by Jesus himself, and nothing is left but the fact that all this was not inserted into the text of Mark until later."

This impressive attempt to limit Christ's significance to the inner life of the individual leads to the fundamental question whether this limitation of Jesus' leadership is possible. Within the frame of this book it would lead us too far if we were to check Erich Winkel's inquiries into textual criticism in detail and to argue with him. Hans Freiherr von Soden, one of the greatest and most impartial experts in this field, undertook it in an extensive critique in the *Theologische Blätter*.<sup>19</sup> We shall take just a few examples which will enable a reader who is not familiar with textual criticism and the study of manuscripts to form his own opinion on how Winkel dealt with the manuscripts of the text of Mark in order to arrive at the conclusion which he presented to the German nation in his book *Das ursprüngliche Evangelium* (The original Gospel) as the mature fruit of many years of textual critical research.

Even the critical theologians of the older school, who regarded the whole prophecy of the end in Mk. xiii as a product of the theology of the early Church influenced by Jewish

<sup>18</sup> Winkel, *Jesus der Sohn*, p. 279.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Freiherr von Soden, "Ein erdichtetes Markusevangelium", in *Theologische Blätter*, xviii (March-April 1939), pp. 65ff.

apocalyptic thought, have not attempted to dispute the historicity of the conversation of Jesus with the sons of Zebedee, Mk. x.35ff. The two disciples James and John ask their Master (according to Matthew it was their mother who did so) to grant them the seats on the right and the left hand of His messianic throne in the coming Kingdom of God. The disciples are sharply reprimanded by Christ for this childish desire for power. Even critical theology has regarded this pericope as genuine tradition. For it is impossible that the later Church should have invented this narrative in which two of her leading men played such a painful part. But according to this conversation with the sons of Zebedee the disciples were firmly convinced that Christ was about to seize royal power and that they could share in its splendour. And even Christ Himself in His reply did not reject this expectation of the disciples as a fanatical error. On the contrary He based Himself entirely on the foundation of this expectation. What He rejected was only the arrogant attempt to forestall God, who kept the filling of the posts in the coming Kingdom to Himself. If we possessed only this one piece of most ancient tradition it would be sufficient proof that the expectation of a coming Realm of Glory is not a later doctrine of the Church but belongs to the most ancient tradition of Christ's words. Winkel attempts to escape from this conclusion by means of an alteration in the text. The word "sit" (*καθίξεν*) on the right and on the left hand of Christ (Mk. x.37, 40) which the disciples use was not, according to Winkel, originally in the text. Instead of *καθίσαι* it must have said *καθαρίσαι* because both words are renderings of the same Aramaic word. Thereupon he deletes this word as an addition of the Egyptian editor. Thus Winkel arrives at the rendering: "Grant us that one may be on thy right and one on thy left hand," which must mean: "James and John ask him (Jesus) that on the way which He now has to go they may ever remain by His side in what He has to suffer and then may approach by his side that unknown glorious something that has to happen afterwards, though they have no notion as to what that would be." But for one thing it is impossible to substitute *καθαρίσαι* for *καθίσαι*. For *καθαρίσαι* can only mean "to clean", "to cleanse", "to purify", which makes no sense here. And the manuscripts which Winkel uses do not give any



authority for the omission of the word. For the words "sit . . . in thy glory" are in all the manuscripts. Materially too it would be completely incomprehensible for Jesus to reprimand the two disciples and afterwards for all the other disciples to be indignant with the two (v. 41) because they had expressed the desire to stay as good comrades by the side of their Master and to meet the passion on His right and on His left hand.

Winkel deals in a similar manner with another narrative in which Jesus looks forward to the coming Realm of glory, viz. the report of the institution of the Lord's supper, when He says: "Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mk. xiv.25). Winkel renders it: "Until I drink the one of a different kind". He thinks that by the "cup of a new, unexpected, unusual kind" Jesus meant His Passion. The decisive words "in the kingdom of God" are then omitted as being a later addition, although they occur in all three Gospels. The critical reason for this is the fact that instead of "Kingdom of God" one manuscript reads "Kingdom of Heaven" and one other "Kingdom of my Father". These words of course have the same meaning as "Kingdom of God".

In the same manner Winkel deals with the scene in the story of the Passion which forms the culminating point of the whole narrative of Mark, when Christ decides His destiny by His testimony before the High Priest. "The high priest asked him: 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mk. xiv.61-2). According to this handed-down text Christ bases Himself entirely on the foundation of the expectation of the book of Daniel and claims for Himself the part of the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. This text also would be sufficient by itself to show that the expectation of a seizure of power by Jesus belongs to the oldest strata of the tradition and the text. If we omit it then all that we are told afterwards makes no sense, especially that the High Priest rent his clothes and that the entire Sanhedrin condemns Jesus to death on the charge of blasphemy. Winkel weakens this text by omitting the decisive words. In xiv.61, as Hans von Soden says, "in the words of the High Priest  $\delta$  Χριστός is omitted on the flimsiest

evidence ( $\Gamma\Phi$  251 K)". This makes it possible to give another meaning to the expression "the Son of the Blessed" which is historically synonymous with the name of Christ. The whole remainder of v. 62 "You will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven" is omitted without any manuscript evidence at all.<sup>20</sup> In other places Winkel supports his argument not by omissions but by linguistically impossible translations. E.g. Mk. xiii.6 where Jesus says: "Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he (or 'I am it', or according to another tradition 'I am the Christ')!' and they will lead many astray." Here Jesus in His prediction of the future is warning against false Messiahs who will precede His second advent. He thereby tacitly assumes that He alone is the true Christ of the last days promised by God. Winkel translates: "Many will come to honour my name and say that I myself am the Christ and they will lead many astray." Soden comments: "For those who know anything at all of the language and the subject no further word is needed."

One can understand without going any further how a scholar like Erich Winkel with a certain view on the person of Jesus rejects a handed-down saying of Jesus as inauthentic because it does not fit in with his preconceived picture of Jesus. But it is misleading if he gives people who cannot check the matter the impression that the omission of this saying of Christ is a conclusion from the textual evidence of the manuscripts. Soden therefore sums up his judgment: "Winkel acts in exactly the same way as an archaeologist who during an excavation would remove pieces which did not fit in with his reconstruction of the buildings or sculptures to be excavated."

We see from this that Winkel's attempt to omit Jesus' expectation of the end from the text has, it is true, the support of extensive research into the manuscripts. But as soon as one checks this work it is shown that his omissions are not the mature fruit of an unbiased examination of the sources but are the result of a view which Winkel already had before he started his work. This is the view that the whole expectation of a coming Kingdom of God was a Jewish dream of the future which was far removed from a Christ who was the Saviour of all men. The national hope of a restoration of the Kingdom of

<sup>20</sup> Soden, *Theologische Blätter*, xviii, p. 52.



David which the Jewish nation connected with it could be the only Jewish feature of this picture of the future. But Erich Winkel himself is of the opinion that the eschatological ending of the book of Daniel, which reappears in the Synoptic Apocalypse, was to some extent "verbally borrowed from Persian eschatology".<sup>21</sup> But if this is the case then we have before us a vision of the future originating entirely from outside the Jewish claim of world-dominion, a prospect of the decisive battle between Light and Darkness in which, according to Parsee belief, the history of the world reaches its consummation.

<sup>21</sup> Winkel, *Jesus der Sohn*, p. 132.

## CHAPTER 13

### *The Inseparableness of Belief in God and Belief in the End*

WE HAVE so far only asked the historical question whether it is possible according to the most ancient reports to dispute that the expectation of a coming consummation is part of Jesus' view of the world. But we shall not in this question attain our object if we only state the historical facts and inquire into the influence of various "racial souls" on the literature of the New Testament. For the whole attitude which we adopt towards the findings on the sources of the Gospels is ultimately dependent on the question: is a strong belief in God, as even Erich Winkel admits Jesus to have had, at all possible without a belief in the end? Is a "metaphysical form of existence" as depicted by Winkel, this "overcoming of this world by the breath of what is behind it", this "state of being above the world by being entirely raised into the being of God" possible without any certitude concerning an ultimate purpose of the whole history of the cosmos? If we want to reach clarity on this point we must ask ourselves why all men who wholeheartedly believed in God have always longed equally passionately for the end of this world, the "cherished latter days" which Luther desired? Why have they always in prophetically shortened perspective expected the advent of this day of God which is to make all things clear within the near future? The reason cannot merely have been the bonds of tradition, habits of thought, or the inheritance of an ancestral intellectual outlook. There must be a deeper connexion here. Why do belief in God and belief in the end belong inseparably together?

Maybe we shall be able to realise this most readily if we remember how particularly those fighting natures who went through life as knights between death and the devil again and again confessed that they would not have been able to stand life without the prospect of the end. Fighting men notice even more than others that in this world a will of destruction has



arisen against God, a power which in a demoniacal way worships itself in order to dethrone God. He who stakes his life in the battle for God and bears with all suffering sees that here there are only two possibilities: either God is God, in which case all opposing powers which have risen against Him must eventually lie shattered on the ground and God must be everything to everyone. Or the battle for God continues in all eternity without a final decision. In this case God is not God but at best a demon, a limited and relative power like all the other powers which measure their strength in the arena of the world. For then God never arrives at a real victory over His enemies. This means that the godless view of the world is right after all. The thinker may be satisfied with the dialectical distinction between the world of absolute values and the eternally imperfect world of existing things. But the fighter who stands in the middle of life regards this whole dualism as a capitulation before an enemy with whom no pact should ever be made. For if I bring my ideals in safety into a higher world of Should-be distinguished from this world of hard reality, then I have admitted in advance that on the level of this world all things must remain relative and imperfect. Thereby I have given up fighting the battle for God to the very end and really conquering this world for God.

That is why simple people who stand in the struggle for existence have never known what to do with the dialectical thought that the expectation of the last judgment meant a "genuine future", that is to say a future that will never become present, that the picture of the future as depicted by prophecy is a symbolic expression for the border-line between time and eternity which is present at every moment. A simple man has a vague feeling that these ingenious formulations take away from under his feet the only ground on which he is able to take up the burden of life every day. If no final victory of God over all resistance is to be expected, no last judgment, no final settlement in which all things are made clear, then there is no God. Then all that happens in the world is a tantalising torment in which that for which we actually live, the fruit for which we reach with eager hunger, always disappears at the very moment we think we have attained it, and so on *ad infinitum* without any purpose. For while it may be true that there is a

God from whose loving fatherly hands, as Winkel puts it, world history comes forth as a continuous creation, if at the same time there is no God who is the Judge of the world, if we have to say: "Man punishes himself but God does not punish him for God is nothing other than love,"<sup>1</sup> then a man may acquire millions by swindle and fraud and eventually be buried with the highest honour; and if he has managed to keep out of the hands of human justice he will never be found out. If there is no day which will bring all things to light, then someone can be falsely accused and eventually, though innocent, on the testimony of false witnesses be condemned to death with loss of his civic honour, and there will be no rehabilitation in eternity. That means that in the end money and brutal power have the final say. All foundations of public morality are thereby upset and dissolution of morals sets in. This view strengthens the crowbar of the thief, encourages the speculator to defraud his fellow countrymen and to enrich himself by the labour of other people, and emboldens the adulterer to indulge in his passions. To everyone with natural feelings therefore the two things belong inseparably together, both stand or fall together: the reality of God and the judgment by which God on the soil of this earth on which we now struggle and suffer will take the world to account and will make a final settlement. If we take the judgment away from the "common man", then we also take away his God. For God is God only if He does not allow himself to be mocked, if one can rely on Him without qualification because He works out His purpose. Only such a God can be taken seriously; His commandments can give all human orders and verdicts their ultimate sanction.

Finally let us try to provide a philosophical ground for this connexion which involuntarily forces itself on everyone who takes his full share in life. So far we have continually called God the supra-polar Reality, fully conscious that by this we were not saying anything positive but merely indicating the limit of our power of reflexion; for we have seen that no power, however tremendous, which is a point within the unending series of mutually interdependent objects can be the ultimate mooring-place of our life, that lends the authority of supreme command to our responsible decisions. Only the *original*

<sup>1</sup> Winkel, *Jesus der Sohn*, p. 126.



Reality which is beyond any causal and temporal series can be to us the support which we ourselves need not hold, but which on the contrary holds us, the foundation on which we can rest without effort. But this supra-polar *original* Being, if it is to be really outside the polar world, must bear all that happens in the world within itself, all things must be in it.<sup>2</sup> There can be no opposing power to which the ultimate Reality is in a polar relation of tension. Only if I know this can I put all my trust in this Ultimate Reality and in respect of all that comes to me say: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But Anselm saw that if anywhere in the universe anything happens against the will of God, if any being in the cosmos, however tiny, casts an impure glance anywhere, then strictly speaking God's whole divinity is put in question. For a power has arisen beside God which limits His power. That the rebellion is limited to a tiny space is not to the point. The smallest opposing enterprise in this case has the same weight as the greatest cosmic revolution which throws whole solar systems and galaxies out of the courses allotted to them by the Creator. The condition of the case remains the same. Any event which takes place against God limits God. God is thereby dragged down to polarity. He is degraded to a terrestrial being that has a competitor with whom He has to come to terms. God is thereby robbed of His divinity.

The only way out of this insoluble difficulty was to make God Himself responsible for the rebellion directed against Him, as the speculative idealists did. But our conscience bars this only possible way out. For if we lie or in dirty selfishness exploit someone else, then our conscience says with inescapable clarity, "You are the man. If you attempt to exculpate yourself by making God responsible then you only commit a new offence." Thereby we are confronted with the final unsolved contradiction of belief in God which becomes more unbearable the more passionately we believe. The pain of this contradiction is continually voiced by the cry that keeps climbing up to heaven from battlefields, dungeons and concentration camps, from hospitals and from the wards of mental homes, from the deepest depths of human misery: "Where is God? How can He allow all this to happen?"

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 36-8 (25-7).

All this leads to the inescapable conclusion that faith in God can be maintained only in the certitude that there is an answer which will completely solve the contradiction on which our thought breaks. But where is this solution to be found? It cannot possibly be in what is already past. The guilt of the past cannot be undone. The solution therefore must be in the future, which holds all possibilities. This leads us to the conclusion that the final future must belong to God. God must have the final word. An end must come in which God will be all in all. For we cannot separate the two questions which we must ask at once as soon as we begin to reflect on our life: Whence have I come? and Where am I going? – or to put it in more comprehensive terms: What is the origin and what is the end of all that happens in the world? The two questions are closely related. With both questions there are only two possibilities.

Either God is not. Then the question as regards the whence and whither of all that happens leads to infinite series which lose themselves in night and mist in both directions. In this case we can only by an act of will fix a point within those lines which lose themselves in infinity, behind which we choose to ask no further, a presupposition which must remain the ultimate starting-point of our reflexion and investigation. And we can fix a point on the infinite line that leads into the darkness of the future, beyond which we do not wish to ask any further, which we make our ultimate aim and supreme value. But in hours of despair this starting-point and this aim which we have posited for ourselves cannot keep our heads above water. For we can hold to them only by our own strength and enthusiasm.

Or God is. Then the restless movement of the question concerning whence and whither, which we cannot stop by our own endeavours, comes to rest in His supra-polar original Being. The whole of Reality comes from God and goes to God. Together with all the creatures which exist and struggle around us we are on our way to God. Wherever we may be we always land in His arms. And it is the same as regards the origin from which we have come. In the *original* beginning when first the polar reality and all temporality came into being, God is all in all. There is as yet no resistance to God's work. And in the final end in which the polar world will be perfected and dis-



solved God is again all in all. There is no longer any resistance to God's work. God's perfecting of the world does away with the satanic hatred of God. Therefore God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Only if we can say both with all our heart do we believe in God. Only then do we give honour to God. Only then are we, together with all that is, secure in God. So long as God is to us only the final point of a perpendicular line which leads vertically upward from every point of history, while the horizontal line on which we move loses itself forward and backward in the mist of boundless infinity, we have not yet been liberated from the spell of ungodliness.

All this shows that the expectation of the end is inseparably connected with all true belief in God. As soon as someone has been gripped by God and engages in the battle for God against the whole world he becomes one who waits and who hastens, who in burning expectation is on his way to the day of God on which the harvest of the world is gathered in. The form which the expectation of this event takes, which after all is quite inconceivable to us men, can differ with various races. In Judaism this expectation of the end took an apocalyptic form which appears to us for the first time in a grand vision in the book of Daniel. An entirely different picture of the future is the drama of the war between light and darkness characteristic of Parseeism. But however great the difference may be, they have one thing in common: in Parseeism too there is no belief in God without a belief in God's final victory over his enemies.

## CHAPTER 14

### *Jesus' Fundamental Statement on the End of the World*

AS SOON as we realise that belief in God and belief in the end belong inseparably together we can have an eye for what the New Testament says concerning the belief in the end that Christ taught His disciples. If we have placed ourselves under the guidance of Christ we know that the Son who is "in the bosom of the Father" because He has never fallen away from communion with the Father, has also received an insight into the plan that the Father has for the world. It is possible that He is unable to tell us, who have entered into discipleship, all that He knows concerning the perfecting of the world. In fact when He took leave of His disciples Jesus said: "I have yet many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now" (Jn. xvi.12). He does not want to burden our imagination with the future. He wants disciples who will tread in His footsteps in the battle of the present and carry the Cross behind Him. He therefore must not tell us anything that would distract us from the present task. Yet He must tell us as much about the future towards which He leads us as is necessary for us to know in order to hold out, lest we lose courage. That is why every word that Jesus spoke on the future of the world is of the utmost importance.

The momentous hints which Jesus gives us concerning the end are perhaps summed up most impressively in the central statement by which He caused His condemnation to death. Unless even the oldest documents which we possess have altered and misrepresented the whole course of His life, Jesus was condemned to death by the highest religious authorities of the Jewish nation and handed over to the authorities of the Roman Empire for execution because to the High Priest's question "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" He broke the invincible silence with which so far He had answered all accusations and said in great solemnity: "I am, and you will see the



Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk. xiv.62). We can of course dispute this report although it was given by a man who was so near to the events of the Passion that he even knew that Simon of Cyrene who carried the Cross of Jesus was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mk. xv.21). But if we dispute the most important statements of this report then we have refused to trust the whole of the oldest tradition concerning the life of Jesus and have no right to base ourselves on the words of the Lord which Erich Winkel, for example, makes the foundation of his interpretation. But if we regard the simple story of the last days of the life of Jesus as we find it in the Gospel according to Mark as reliable, then Jesus by His solemn reply to the High Priest added His seal to the whole of His life's work.

This was the dramatic climax towards which all that He had so far said and done in his whole life had been hastening, and at the same time it was the dramatic turning point in the history of the nation of Israel. For by these words He confronted the whole Jewish nation with the final fatal question. Either He was the One sent by God, according to His solemn declaration, and then the nation ought to acknowledge Him as its King. Or He was merely pretending to be what according to these words He wanted to be, and then He ought to die as a blasphemer; and the judges ought to do what the Tract *Sanhedrin* vii, 4.5 prescribes for Jewish judges in every case of blasphemy. They have to tear their cloaks and must not mend them again. "And the High Priest tore his mantle, and said: 'Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' and they all condemned him as deserving death" (Mk. xiv.63-4). The three first Evangelists unanimously preserved this historical moment. They realised that at this moment the destiny of Israel was decided. Israel had got into a dangerous whirlpool in which the swimmer can only be drawn either upward or down. She was dragged down. She decided against her Ruler sent by God and up to the present day is under the curse of that decision.

The reply that Jesus gave the High Priest at this moment pregnant of destiny contained in concise form a view into the future which is of the greatest import. For hereby Jesus clearly confessed himself to be the "Son of man" prophesied in the book

of Daniel, that is to say the Man in whom after the end of the four Empires (which all have an animal character) true humanity will fulfil itself and the Kingdom will be established. This is a scene of tremendous momentum: the Man who is standing defenceless and powerless before His judges places Himself in contrast to those in power in His nation and in the Roman Empire as the Ruler who is to come in order to reduce to naught all the powers of the world. The most important point about this is that at least in its main features Jesus accepts the vision of the future of the world given by Daniel. For He solemnly adopts the principal part in the final act of the cosmic drama seen in the book of Daniel. If at this historic moment Jesus described Himself as the Son of man in Daniel's sense then there can be no doubt that the "Kingdom of Heaven" also, which He had announced in His first call to repentance, is the eternal Empire that according to Daniel is to follow the terrestrial empires. For the import of this solemn declaration by Jesus it is immaterial whether the author of Daniel lived about 600 B.C. under Jehoiakim in the Babylonian exile, as he says himself, or whether the book was written in the first half of the second century B.C. in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. The truth of the prophecy does not depend on when it was first announced. It is also immaterial for our question that Judaism applied the prophecy in Dan. vii.18 to itself and deduced national claims of world dominion from it. According to Matthew's Gospel Jesus told the Jews that in Him was fulfilled the word about the stone which the builders had rejected but which God had made the corner-stone; and He adds, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Mt. xxi.43). If, at the moment when this prophecy was fulfilled and the Jewish nation threw Him on the rubbish-heap as a useless stone, Jesus saw the new Kingdom that God builds on the rejected corner-stone, then He could not possibly have meant the world dominion of Judaism over all other nations. He saw all the animal empires coming to naught and a new Empire rising from their ruin like a phoenix from the ashes, a new Empire that no longer has a national character, the Empire to which the Son of man gathers the "saints of the Most High", that is to say the men consecrated to God.



If therefore Christ adopted the prophecy of Daniel then He precisely did not make a pact with this imperfect world in the sense of Idealism and withdraw from the hard world of facts into the sphere of eternal truths and values. On the contrary He put forward a claim to this world in which the Empires combat one another. He ascribed to Himself the authority, at an historical moment determined by God, to put an end to the whole political and economic strife for power and to establish the realm of true humanity in which the meek "inherit the earth" (Mt. v.5).

But does not this world claim of Jesus contradict His saying reported in John's Gospel which Oswald Spengler and later Erich Winkel interpreted as a retreat into the supra-temporal sphere, His word to Pilate: "My kingship is not of this world"? For when the procurator asked Him if He was the King of the Jews, Jesus answered: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world" (Jn. xviii.36). Oswald Spengler says: "When Jesus was taken before Pilate, then *the world of facts and the world of truths were face to face in immediate and implacable hostility*. It is a scene appallingly distinct and overwhelming in its symbolism, such as the world had never before and has never since looked at. . . . In the famous question of the Roman Procurator: 'What is truth?' – the one word that is race-pure in the whole Greek Testament – lies *the entire meaning of history*, the exclusive validity of the deed, the prestige of the State and war and blood, the all-powerfulness of success and the pride of eminent fitness. Not indeed the mouth, but the silent feeling of Jesus answers this question by that other which is decisive in all things of religion – *What is actuality?* For Pilate actuality was all; for him nothing. Genuine religion can never adopt any other attitude to history and the powers of history. . . . There is no bridge between directional Time and timeless Eternity, between the *course* of history and the *existence* of a divine world-order, in the structure of which the word 'providence' or 'dispensation' denotes the form of causality. *This is the final meaning of the moment in which Jesus and Pilate confronted one another*. In the one world, the historical, the Roman caused the Galilean to be crucified – that was his Destiny. In the other

world, Rome was cast for perdition and the Cross became the pledge of Redemption – that was the ‘will of God’. *Religion is metaphysics and nothing else.*”<sup>1</sup> Erich Winkel translates this word of Jesus to Pilate in the same sense, “My Kingdom is not terrestrial”, and regards this as a radical rejection of His claim on the royal throne of Israel.

But if the Christ of John’s Gospel had declined the judgment of this world, then He could not have said: the Father has given the Son “authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment” (Jn. v.27-9). It is quite clear that Jesus was here looking forward to a future hour at which He would be given power over this world. But if He reckoned with this approaching critical hour for the world then His solemn declaration before Pilate cannot mean that He disclaimed the coming judgment of the world. What then does it mean when He said that He made no royal claim on “this world”? The contrast to “this world” is evidently not the transcendent world of eternal truths. There is therefore no question here of the Platonic dualism between the empirical world and the world of ideas. This world (ὁ κόσμος οὗτος) is rather the “‘olām hăzê” as contrasted with the “‘olām hăbā”, this age as contrasted with the age to come which will be initiated when God’s hour strikes, when all those who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of man. John’s Gospel too therefore does not live by a static relation between the two spheres but moves in the dynamic high tension between the present era and the coming aeon, toward which the development of all things is hastening with power and which secretly is already there like the buds in early spring. Jesus could give the representative of the Roman power the reassuring answer, “But my kingship is not from the world”, only because the hour of which He spoke in Jn. v had not yet come, that is to say because the time which God has allotted to the fourth of the kingdoms in the book of Daniel was not yet

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Munich 1923, vol. II, pp. 262-3; Engl. trans. *The Decline of the West* by C. F. Atkinson, London 1928, vol. II, p. 218.



finished: "For the time being<sup>2</sup> my kingship consists in being a witness to the God's truth and gathering and calling all those who are of the truth."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. xviii.36 the last words: "But *now* my kingship is not from the world" (*now* not in R.S.V.).

## CHAPTER 15

### *The Delay in the Perfecting of the World*

LET US EXAMINE for one more moment what it means that according to all the reports Jesus said on His way to death that He would sit at the right hand of Power (according to Ps. cx) and then as the Son of man come with the clouds (in accordance with Dan. 11). We cannot help asking how this is meant. If He really is the Son of man, why then does not His Kingdom start at once with power? Why does He not destroy His judges "with the breath of his lips" and crush everything that opposes His dominion? If He is already here, why does He still have to come? Here again we are confronted with an incomprehensible mystery of God's plan in history. In the first chapters of the present book we had to make it clear that from a Biblical point of view the question of power is not the most central question of our existence but the question of guilt. Reality is like a cone of light which comes into being by rays radiating from one invisible centre. The invisible centre in which all energies are contained is the relationship of our inner being to God, that is to say to the *original* Being by which we live. If in this vital point the connexion is interrupted on account of an undissolved guilt then the current of life is interrupted on the whole front. Guilt means impotence, that is to say it checks the will in its effort to achieve a tangible form. Guilt also means impotence of cognition, that is to say it darkens any deeper vision. Guilt means unbledness and disfigurement of creation. But as soon as in the invisible centre of life the disturbance is eliminated, the guilt atoned and the connexion with the *original* Source restored, then rays of power radiate from it in all directions. Atonement means strength, realisation of the will, life, enlightenment of our cognition, blessedness and beauty. That this fundamental thesis of the Biblical view of life is right must be obvious to anyone who has, at some time in his life,



experienced the inner liberty in which we find ourselves when, for example, an old guilt which has been on our conscience for years is talked over thoroughly with the person before whom we were guilty and is done away with and forgiven. We notice at once that we experience a rejuvenescence and animation of all our powers. It is as when in spring the ice is broken, the loosened pieces float down the stream and at once the first fresh green vegetation is seen on the banks. "Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is life and salvation." But if guilt and the solution of guilt really is the centre of our life from which the destroying or restoring rays radiate in all directions, then it must evidently follow that he who is in contact with God is in league with the Almighty Power. And vice versa any rebellion against God must be shipwrecked an account of its inner impossibility and end in weakness, impotence and ugliness. But the Old Testament is already burdened with the insoluble problem of the abnormal state of affairs, often mentioned in the Psalms and also in the book of Job, that "the evildoers flourish", that the torn condition of man burdened with sin displays a demoniacal power and creativity, that there is even a demoniacal beauty in which ungodliness assumes bodily form.

This enigmatic state of affairs assumed its ultimate depth and seriousness at the moment when He came into the world who had the inner authority to take on to Himself the guilt of the world and to deprive Satan of his assumed rights. Now, so one would think, the curse would be broken, now "everything would become different", now all the powers of creation would break out again unchecked and hasten toward the perfecting of the world. But this effect does not come. The Redeemer of the world stands captive before His judges and with chained hands gives Himself into the power of the rulers of the world who dishonour and destroy Him. It is true that He promises His return on the clouds of heaven. He is looking forward to the turn of the destiny of the world as described in Dan. vii. 14: "He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." But

all this belongs to the future. Between the present time and this future there is an interval. Jesus says He will be seated "at the right hand of power", that is to say in league with the power who causes all that is and happens. But for the time being this power is held back. According to what we are told in the Acts Stephen, the first in the long procession of martyrs who were to meet death for the sake of Christ, before he fell under the shower of stones saw "the Son of man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts vii.56). But the Son of man does not interfere to protect him from his murderers. He has retired into the invisible sphere where all the powers are gathered which are capable of creating and destroying the world. He is waiting there till God's final act of power comes, till God will make all His enemies His footstool (Ps. cx.1; 1 Cor. xv.25). This power is like a mass of snow high over a valley in the mountains. A shot, a yodelling song or any disturbance of the air can be sufficient to loosen the massed snow which rolls down as an avalanche and buries all that it meets on its way. But for the time being the enormous energy contained in this mass of snow, which is capable of destroying whole villages, is a potential energy which is as yet not effectual. Similarly the power of Christ's work of atonement, which contains a strength capable of changing the whole world and destroying all God's enemies, is latent as potential energy until the sound of the last trumpet shall loosen the avalanche. The power is there but it is still held in check. This causes a breathless tension. For from the point of view of eternity the redemption and the perfecting of the world fill only one moment. They are merely two sides of one act of God. If the satanic opposing power has lost its claim on the world then thereby it has also lost its power over the world. If the rebellion against God has been cast down then God's creative power can again flow through the world without opposition, then the new creation is there. The act of atonement and the new creation belong as inseparably together as the firing of a shell and its impact, as lightning and the ensuing rolling thunder. The Church therefore, which has experienced the power of the redemption of the world, is waiting for the change of the world with the same tension as after we have seen the lightning we expect the rumbling of the thunder. For lightning and thunder are merely two effects of



the same electrical discharge. The interval is caused only because the waves of sound take longer to cover the distance than the rays of light. But the sound must come. Once there has been lightning the thunder cannot fail to come.

All the riddles of the divine government of the world and all the temptations and trials of faith are contained in one fact under which we have to bow even though we do not comprehend it. In the invisible centre of all Reality the fundamental change has already begun. But the discharge of power which must radiate from this centre in all directions is still kept in check. The mass of snow hangs threateningly over the world but the avalanche has not yet hurtled down. Nearly all Jesus' parables of the Kingdom are attempts to prepare the disciples for this unexpected interval and to strengthen them so that they may be able to hold out. The King of this Realm of God who could crush any resistance against God begins by going through the country as a Sower and allowing the greater part of the seed to be eaten by the birds and to be choked by the thorns (Mt. xiii.3-9). The bridegroom keeps the maidens waiting for hours. Slowly the long worrying hours of the night pass by till midnight: "As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept" (Mt. xxv.5). The master of the house who has entrusted his property to his slaves keeps them waiting for a long time. This has a demoralising effect on the household. It seems that he is not coming back at all but may have died abroad. "That wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed' (here again we have the expression *χρονίζει*, "he is a long time") and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken" (Mt. xxiv.48-9). "A nobleman went into a far country to receive kingly power" (Lk. xix.12). He leaves the administration of his property to his servants. How enigmatic! He to whom all things belong, whose property we ourselves are, has so to speak left for an indefinite time. He has retired to "the far land" of invisibility. That is a difficult trial and a dangerous temptation to become ungodly. It tempts us to forget Him and to deal with the entrusted property as we please.

What does this keeping in check of God's power mean? It puts so to speak an insulating layer around the central question of our existence, the unique importance of which we forget so

easily on account of our need of happiness and power and beauty. God thereby reminds us sincerely and emphatically that the issue between Him and us is not in the first place pleasure and success but Himself and His absolute claim on our life. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt. vi.33). That our conscience should come to an understanding with God should be so infinitely important to us that compared to this it is entirely irrelevant whether we stay alive and have success or whether we die and perish. "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" ("life", R.S.V.; Mt. xvi.26). If we are not prepared to give up entirely all that we could gain in this world we are not capable of holding out in the intermediate condition in which God presses us to His heart while as yet He keeps His power over us in check. Our faith must be shipwrecked on this rock. That is why Jesus says: Whosoever does not give up all things cannot be my disciple (Lk. xiv.26).

This readiness to deny ourselves has nothing to do with Buddhist asceticism or escape from the world. Together with the reconciliation of her conscience the Church of the Crucified has also received dominion over the world. And therefore she has a burning love for this world and for all the creative powers to be found within it. In the peace of conscience we already breathe the morning air of the approaching perfecting of the world. But in the intervening time through which we have to live first the abnormal condition which Jesus described so vividly in the parable of the tares is still in force. An enemy has sown weeds among the wheat. The servants want to uproot them. But the householder says: "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Mt. xiii.30). The wheat, which has an eternal future and is to be gathered into God's barns, has no more room and claim on the precious soil than the weed that God's enemy has sown and that is destined for destruction. Both have the same opportunity of sinking their roots into the moist earth. Without figurative speech: the Church of God which has God's almighty power behind it and which consequently could have "more than twelve legions of angels" at her disposal here and now, just like her Master, to defeat all her enemies, battles in the arena of this world under the same con-



ditions as the anti-godly power. Anyone who regards events from the point of view of a spectator must get the impression that the movement of Christ is merely one of the many waves in the ocean of the history of religions, a minor movement among many other religious and political movements competing with one another, just one more philosophy advertising its product on the vast philosophical market and by means of travelling preachers, pamphlets and the wireless canvassing for adherents, at times brought to the top by a strong current of public life, at other times, when the wind changes, put aside as antiquated and out of date. But if the Church, though she has God's almighty power behind her, is battling under the same conditions as the opposing movements, then she must in most cases suffer defeat in this world. For in this battle she is *a priori* at a disadvantage. She is fighting for an invisible Lord and lives by an invisible future, while the adversaries have the whole power of the visible world on their side. If therefore wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest then the weeds must continually overgrow the wheat. The situation must arise which Jesus foretold to His disciples when He said: "Lo, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt. x.16). The power of the self-worshipping will of destruction directed against God which should perish by its own impossibility must develop into a demoniacal power which lives by preying on God. A demoniacal joy of life must come into being which within the world gets intoxicated with itself, a diabolical counterpart to the blessedness of the man who has been reconciled with God, and a demoniacal beauty of a self-sufficient world as a counterpart to the glory of the new creation.

This is why the question arises in which all the riddles of the world have always been comprised in the eyes of the believing Church standing in this battle. Why does God allow Himself to be mocked? Why does the Son of God silently allow Himself to be jeered at by men who at every moment live only by the breath of God and are maintained above the abyss of their nothingness by God alone? What is the meaning of this intervening time? We cannot expect an answer until the final chapter. But for the time being we want to emphasise quite clearly this one point that dawns on us as soon as we have received reconciliation through Christ: that the interval be-

tween reconciliation and perfection, the *χρονίζειν* also comes from God. God is the One who as yet holds back His judging hand. God hesitates before He deals the final blow. By this hesitation He allows whole churches to be wiped out; He allows whole nations to become the victims of atheist propaganda; He allows the great apostasy to come. God himself by keeping His power as the Judge in check has let loose all the storms of ungodliness. All this is part of His plan. Therefore the Church which possesses the message of redemption should never doubt the certainty of the approaching consummation. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk. XII.32).



## CHAPTER 16

### *God's Plan for the World until its Perfecting*

TO MAKE IT CLEAR what it means to become followers of Christ<sup>1</sup> one usually starts by showing how after Jesus' death the disciples began to gather again under the influence of a miraculous event, how the Church of Christ as an independent body separated from the Jewish Synagogue, how the highly excited expectation of the Second Coming gradually calmed down and how the young Church began to organise herself in the world as a religious society with the exalted Christ as her invisible centre. If the Church of Christ as the Congregation of the faithful and the "Kingdom of God on earth" is the real purpose of the development, then the end and the change of the world can appear as no more than a remote streak of light on the horizon. The expectation of the *consummatio mundi* is the tumultuous finale of a tremendous piece of music in which all the themes of the new piety are recapitulated once more so that the total work is artistically finished. It then suffices to speak of this end only in a final section, that is to say in a kind of final prophetic prospect, after the Church has first been depicted as the development and growth of God's Realm on earth, as Schleiermacher did. But the very shifting of the hope to the end causes the original movement of Christ to lose its whole dynamic power. For the power of faith of the early Church was entirely and solely due to the fact that the Church did not for a moment regard herself as a self-sufficient and self-contained body but only as a temporary phenomenon, as a passing phase, as a bridge to something else that had not yet appeared but that hovered over the world like a threatening cloud. Only a man who is absolutely certain that the future belongs to him is able to lift the present

<sup>1</sup> The German word *Nachfolge* is usually rendered by "imitation" which is always inaccurate and often, as here, entirely wrong. It denotes following someone, walking behind someone, discipleship. Tr.

world off its hinges. The New Testament Church is like a bold iron bridge spanning a torrent by one lofty arch, supported only by two piers, one on this side and the other on the other side of the present world-time. As soon as one of the piers is destroyed the whole bridge collapses and all those who are on it are lost. One pier is the event at Golgotha, the other pier is the Son of God's seizure of power for which we are yet waiting. As the iron bridge exists only because it is suspended between these two piers, the Church exists only in virtue of the inseparable unity between the event which has taken place and that which is coming. She lives in virtue of the fact that it is the same One who was and who is to come. If God's act to come should prove to be an illusion or should dissolve itself into a dialectic relationship present at all times and all places, then the Church would immediately cease to exist and would lose her meaning. For she is there only as a bridge to that coming event. Her existence is identical with the fact that there are people who "have tasted . . . the powers of the age to come" (Heb. vi.5) and who revolutionise the present world on account of that age.

If therefore we want to understand reflectingly what the Church of Christ is then we have to apply the same method as an engineer who builds a bridge. He must first secure the piers in a foundation of reinforced concrete. Only then can he build his steel construction from this firm beginning and accomplish the bold arch across the torrent. We must therefore begin by fixing our eyes on the pier on the other bank to which the bridge leads; only then can we understand the construction of the bridge. This second pier which supports the bridge on which we have ventured under the guidance of Christ is as yet invisible, so to speak shrouded in mist, while the first pier, the event of Golgotha, is in the sunlight of history. The Church has gained a firm stand on the visible act of atonement and moves into the encompassing mist of the future to meet the approaching act of God in which she believes without seeing.

If we start on this road into the unknown future and think about the end towards which we move then we must tell ourselves quite honestly in advance that it would be an adventurous and risky enterprise if we were dependent on our reflexion, our experience of the world and our sense of reality. For it



belongs to the essence of our human existence that we are allowed no glance into the future. We see the accomplished facts but the undecided future is hidden by an opaque veil. Any attempt to postulate the future from a logical principle or to deduce it from a fundamental law which one imagines one has discovered, as for example Hegel and entirely differently Marx attempted to do, is wrecked by the incalculability of reality. By every construction of this kind man goes beyond his limitations. The titanic effort which Hegel made in particular in his philosophy of history makes us realise clearly the dead point where we land if we want to rend the veil that covers the future. Hegel, as he said quite openly at the beginning of his philosophy of history, had to claim for the human mind what Paul said in 1 Cor. II.10 of the divine Spirit: "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." Only a mind which is in immediate contact with the Spirit of God which creates the world and makes history can look into the future. Such a mind is initiated into God's plans.

This means that with all our prophecies of the future we are confronted with an either-or. Either we keep within our human limitations. In this case we do not get beyond conclusions from uncertain presuppositions and highfalutin dreams, which we ourselves know very well are merely products of our burning desire, our enthusiasm or our instinct for power. Or there really is a possibility of breaking through our human limitations and reaching a quiet certainty about the future. In that case we must come under the guidance of a mind which is in entirely immediate and undisturbed communion with the creative Spirit of God, who consequently has been initiated into all God's plans and who can say about Himself: "No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. XI.27). That is to say we either stop at the darkness of an impenetrable future and reject all the words of Jesus dealing with the future of the world as concepts belonging to His time and as Jewish dreams; or we entrust ourselves for our way into the future to the One who makes this lofty claim for Himself. Then we cease once and for all to make our own conjectures as regards the destiny of the world. We trust absolutely that what this One tells us regarding the end of the world is no human fancy but is based on a real

knowledge of God's plan, and that He made this knowledge, which is of infinite importance for His Church, so clear to His disciples that we are perfectly justified in believing the reports of the first witnesses.

If however for our thoughts on God's plans for the future we entrust ourselves to the guidance of Christ and listen to what He said according to the oldest witnesses, we discover that He has left us no graphic and circumstantial programme for the future that would satisfy our curiosity. He only sketched the main points of the divine plan for the future in a few indications pregnant with destiny. He drew in bold lines the large episodes in which God's plan is completed. Four points continually recur in His parables and in the most relevant statements He made before His death. The first step to the perfecting of the world is the hidden enthronement of the crucified Son of man. In the solemn declaration before the High Priest of Israel by which He sealed His death He said, as we saw: "Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power" (Mt. xxvi.64). That is to say immediately after His death the Son of man will ascend to share God's throne in the sense of Ps. cx. He does not say how and in what form this enthronement is to take place which is invisible to the world. Only in the three major predictions of the Passion as reported by all three Synoptic Gospels in the time after Peter's confession (Mt. xvi.21, xvii.22-3; Mk. viii.31, ix.31, x.33-4; Lk. ix.22, xviii.31-3), He speaks of a resurrection on the third day. The second step towards the perfecting of the world is the public seizure of power, visible to all, by the secret King of the world. "Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn" (Mt. xxiv.30). "Then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mk. xiii.26). The third step is the resurrection of all men, which Jesus defends against the Sadducees (Mt. xxii.23ff). "The hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice" (Jn. v.28). This is the preparation for the great settlement of the Judge of the world with all the nations and the division between those who go away into eternal punishment and those who enter into eternal life (Mt. xxv.31-46). The fourth and last step is the end, the *consummatio mundi* (συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτου), the harvest of



world-history, in which the ripe fruit of the whole long development of the world is gathered into God's barns. The beginning of the new age which in contrast to the present condition of the world, hemmed in by death, is called "Life", the existence "equal to angels" free from death and sexuality (Lk. xx.36).

These are the four most important parts of the divine plan for the perfecting of the world of which Jesus told His disciples. All the predictions of the future in the later Church up to the Revelation of John are a fugue on the theme given by Jesus Himself. And any thoughts we ourselves can have of the future of the world can only consist in our reflectively following the fundamental lines of this concept.

## CHAPTER 17

### *The Place of the Resurrection of Christ in the Plan for the Perfecting of the World*

IF WE SURVEY the four acts of which, according to the prediction of Jesus, the drama of the world is to consist, then the three final acts are immediately understandable once we have realised that God, if He really is God, must eventually Himself unravel the complicated knot of world events and that He will accomplish this solution through the Son in whose hand He has placed the destiny of the world. From these two presuppositions it follows as a matter of course that the Son of man must arrive at a final settlement with all those who have responsibly co-operated in world events, and that when the end of the old era comes the creation of the new heavens and the new earth will take place. So far everything is more or less comprehensible. But now the difficulty begins. This consists in the fact that the first of the four acts which Jesus announced, the enthronement of the Crucified, invisible to the world, must take place immediately after the death of Jesus. We should expect, if Christ really is the Redeemer and Perfecter of the world, either that He should have been rehabilitated before the whole world immediately after His shameful death and that His Resurrection would have inaugurated the change in the world and the public establishment of His all-embracing Kingdom. Or, if there is to be an interval between the redemption and the perfecting of the world, then the enthronement of the Son of man should come after this interval, that is to say should be postponed to the end. In other words, as the Jewish people believe to the present day, the Messiah should not appear until the conclusion of the present age, but should then come at once as One who has power, in order to judge the world and to glorify His people. Why this hidden enthronement of the King of the future before the open seizure of power? Why does the perfecting of the world look like the march of an army whose



general goes before and alone and carries the flag in front while his faithful soldiers follow at a great distance and behind them the immense procession of all the others? That the Ruler of the last days should first walk on the earth as a sower and should then die and ascend to God's right hand without changing the outward appearance of the world, and that He should only afterwards come the second time in power and glory, this is evidently peculiar to the New Testament view of the destiny of the world; this fundamentally alters Daniel's vision of the future and goes far beyond any hopeful Jewish expectations. We shall see later that this peculiarity of Jesus' plan for the world gives the New Testament Church her unique character. Why is it that the crucified Redeemer is at once changed into the form of glory but the change of the whole remaining creation is so long in coming? Here we are confronted with the mystery of the fact of the Resurrection, which is the firm ground on which the whole early Church rests.

The question with which the testimony of the Resurrection of Christ confronts us is not in the first place how it was possible that the avalanche of death which buries all of us was arrested at this one point. That is only the second question. The first question we have to ask is, why did victory over death, if it was possible in virtue of God's omnipotence, remain confined to this one occasion, why it is for the time being an isolated event in the midst of history like a lone lighthouse on the shore of a dark sea, while the whole remaining creation is still in the shadow of death. Only if we begin with this question can we come nearer to an understanding of the Resurrection. Why did Christ enter into the perfected state at once while the whole of the rest of the world remained untouched? This must be connected with the infinite advantage that Christ has over us. For Christ, as we saw, was prepared for His work of atonement only because at the central point of His existence He was in a different position from all other people. He alone, unlike all others, did not have to return as a prodigal son from farness from God to the Father's house. For He had never fallen away from His sonship. He is the Son from all eternity. He held his son's relationship upright even in the tempest of all the temptations of the world. He was "in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. iv.15). According to the

Biblical view full power, glory and blessedness correspond with pure communion with God. For the decision concerning all the other questions of life is made in the invisible centre of existence where the connexion with God exists. The message that Christ has risen therefore offers no problem to a man who believes in Christ. For Christ after winning the battle does not need to be given power, life and glory. He has all these things of Himself. In His case contact with the Source of life was never broken. The *original* divine power by which the whole creation lives and from which we continually sever ourselves by our own fault must flow through His whole being. That the Son should assume impotence and disgrace was contrary to His true essence. It was a voluntary resignation of the divine power which was at His disposal. He took this resignation on Himself. For only in this way could He fulfil His mission and carry out the settlement between God and the dark power to the terrible end. He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil. II.7).

But now, once his mission was accomplished, it was bound to be as if a lock-gate had been opened and the stored-up masses of water poured into their channel with renewed power. Humiliation had to be followed by exaltation and consequently by the full power which belongs to sonship. Here no delay was possible. But it is a different case with us. We have left the Father's house. Our way to the heart of the Father first had to be opened by the Son intervening for us and taking our burden on Himself. If we receive the glory which belongs to the newly granted childship then this glory is not something to which we are entitled. It is a present that we are given by someone else and which is not at all at our own disposal. Therefore it is not for us to decide when we are to receive it. If God, for reasons which we cannot grasp, wishes to introduce an interval between the act of atonement and the powerful act of perfecting, this interval cannot start immediately after the Crucifixion. For this would delay Jesus' own exaltation. But this, as we saw, is impossible. Consequently there is only one point where this interval can occur, viz. in the time between the exaltation of Jesus and the perfecting of the world. The delay can consist only in an interruption of the perfecting of the world after it has already started, that is to say after its first



stage has already taken place. And this is how the extraordinary state of affairs has arisen, that the King of the future has already ascended to His throne but His Kingdom is not to be established until the age to come.

There is something very peculiar about this enthronement of the Son of man. For it must take place in such a manner that His incognito before the world is not broken. The decision of the judgment must not yet take place. Weed and wheat must grow together until the harvest. If Christ after His death had appeared before the world in the glory of the Judge of the world, then the question of power would already have been decided. For the mere visible manifestation of Christ in His full power would be sufficient to force His opponents to acknowledge His royal authority and to decide indubitably the question concerning Christ in the eyes of the whole world. For it is said in the Revelation: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced Him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him" (Rev. 1.7, cf. Mt. xxiv.30). Nothing further therefore needs to happen, no word is even necessary, the appearance of Christ in His glory will suffice to convince all men without exception, even the sceptics, even His fanatical opponents, even the leaders of the atheist movements of all times, that He is the One He said He was when He was standing before the High Priest with tied hands. If this moment of final decision is yet to be delayed then His enthronement must not take place in public before all the world but in secret. And yet it must be made sufficiently visible to the faithful Church for her to be absolutely sure of her Lord's accession to the throne. For the exaltation of Jesus is decisive for the validity of His work of atonement by which the Church lives. His full power, as we have seen, is the inevitable expression of His sonship. If this full power is not shown immediately after His death then His atoning authority is put in question. For the necessary condition would be lacking, viz. the communion with God from which His exaltation inevitably follows. This is why Paul can write to the Church in Corinth: "If Christ has not been raised . . . you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished" (1 Cor. xv.17-18).

All this leads to the strange twofold vision of the Resurrection

which makes it so difficult for those who are outside to understand. To the "chosen witnesses" whom the risen Christ sends out into the world the miracle of the Resurrection has such irresistible power and reality that it becomes the unshakeable foundation of their lives which is capable of bringing them through years of battle and through martyrdom. The witnesses had to be sure that the King of the future had already ascended the throne, as it is said in the Epistle to the Ephesians: He has raised Christ "from the dead and made Him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under his feet" (Eph. 1.20-2). Only in this certitude could the witnesses hold out against the whole world and suffer martyrdom gladly. And yet the event of the Resurrection must not be a demonstration before the world. For that would have anticipated the harvest-time of world history and done away with the intervening time in which both grow together.

There are various reasons for the discrepancies in the New Testament reports concerning the Resurrection of Christ, which cannot be eliminated by any attempt at harmonising them. But one of the main reasons may have been that even the first narrators had the secret desire in their hearts that the miracle of the Resurrection really should have been the thing that could make our position so much easier in the face of a world hostile to Christ; the great public rehabilitation of the shamefully executed Christ before all the world, and particularly before His enemies. In the Apocryphal Gospels of which fragments still exist, the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of Peter, probably written about A.D. 150, this fiery desire of the human heart bursts out in flames. In the Gospel of the Hebrews not only Roman soldiers but also servants of the High Priest are gathered around the tomb. And the Risen One appears to those servants and as far as we can see from the fragment tells them to tell their lords that He has gained the victory over them. As evidence He gives one of the servants the linen cloth in which His body was wrapped.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus*, ch. II. Cf. R. Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels*, Harmondsworth 1957, p. 106.



of Peter goes one step further. Here at the command of Pilate the centurion Petronius representing the Roman Empire is guarding the tomb with his soldiers. "And elders and scribes went with him to the tomb" (Ps. Pt. 31).<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the representatives of the Roman Empire and of the Jewish Sanhedrin are gathered by the tomb. But during the night the soldiers on guard "saw the heavens opened". "When the soldiers saw this they roused the centurion and the elders . . . and while they were still telling them what they had seen, they saw three men coming out of the tomb, two supporting the third, and a cross was following them, and the heads of the two reached as high as heaven but that of the third who was led by them was higher than the heavens" (Ps. Pt. 36-41). Here the risen Lord appears as the conquering hero in supra-terrestrial glory before the representatives of the two hostile powers which caused His death. When we see that even in the early years of the second century the Easter tradition flourished to such an extent and that the event of the Resurrection had grown into a tremendous demonstration before the worldly power hostile to Christ, then this is an extraordinary sign of the faithfulness of the New Testament tradition, for in only one canonical Gospel do we find a slight hint at a saving of Jesus' honour before His enemies, viz. in the story of the guard at the tomb which is peculiar to Matthew. It is true that the guards do not see Christ, but "an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. . . . And for fear of him the guards trembled and became as dead men". Afterwards some of them arrive in the city and tell the High Priests all that has happened and they consult with the elders. Then they bribe the soldiers to spread the tale that the disciples have stolen the body during the night (Mt. xxviii.2-15). If we disregard this small beginning of a public demonstration which never got any further than a small beginning, then all the testimonies of the New Testament, however varied, agree in the fundamental view summed up according to the Acts by Peter in the house of Cornelius in these words: "God raised him on the third day and made him manifest, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires publiées par les membres de la mission archéologique Française au Caire, 1892, TOM. I, FASC. I.*

God as his witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts x.40-1).

On account of this the miracle of the Resurrection is *a priori* placed on a completely different level from all other events which have taken place in history and which can be established from the historian's point of view as neutral spectator. For at the moment it is as yet irrelevant under what human category we try to place the event, whether we regard it as the miraculous bringing to life of a corpse or as a so-called objective vision, or whether we realise that by these human categories we cannot arrive at what happened – at all events the unshakeable starting point for an understanding of the whole event must be that it happened in such a manner that it could not be seen by all the people but only by witnesses whom God had chosen for the purpose in advance, that is to say the men to whom God wished to give the lonely burden of the tremendous task of staking their persons, indeed their very lives, on the reality of this event, no matter whether the world would crucify or burn them for it or leave them alive. As early as the first period of oral tradition, of which we find the traces in 1 Cor. xv, the Church knew exactly which men had met the Risen One and in what sequence these encounters had taken place. He first of all "appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time. . . . Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles" and finally to Paul (1 Cor. xv.5-8). Something happened to these men that had never happened to anyone before and was not to happen to anybody afterwards. This marked them like trees in the wood marked by the forester for felling. This shows us that men cannot see the risen Lord without by this very fact of seeing Him being marked for the remainder of their lives, because from this moment onward they are full of a certainty which the world hostile to Christ cannot comprehend. They know that God's victory over all the opposing powers, that is to say the victory of Christ over the whole world, is merely a question of time. In the first Epistle of Peter, which was probably written by a witness of the Resurrection, this certainty breaks forth like a river in the words: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of



Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1.3-5). That is to say one cannot meet the Risen One without being born a second time under the impact of this encounter and receiving new organs to see a new Reality never before regarded as possible.

## CHAPTER 18

### *The Resurrection of Christ as the Beginning of the Last Days*

WHAT WAS THIS EVENT that inwardly changed all those who saw it? This effect is comprehensible only on one condition, viz. if the Resurrection of Christ is in no way an event belonging to the present order of time as a link in the chain of events. Neither is it one of those miraculous events which do happen from time to time in our order of time, like the miracles of healing or the raising of dead as we find them in the apostolic age. The Resurrection of Christ is something fundamentally distinguished from all events which take place on the level of the present time. It is the beginning of the perfecting of the world, the beginning of God's final victory over this earth. That was the view of the first witnesses. According to Paul the Risen One is the first fruits (*ἀπαρχή*) of the approaching harvest of the world. "For as by one man came death, by one man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv.20-2; R.S.V.: "a man"). That is to say, as the process of death, once the stone has started rolling, can no longer be stopped but changes the whole of world history into one great dance of death, so also can the resurrection of the world once it has started no longer be stopped. It is like the awakening of the spring of the world. The movement cannot cease until the whole creation has become new. The Resurrection of Christ therefore is the beginning of the new creation of the world which has been interrupted for a certain time by the "creative interval" in which we are still living at the moment, before it is entirely completed.

If this is the meaning and value of the miracle of the Resurrection, then it must contain all that belongs to the final victory of God over the demoniacal counter-movement which destroyed the connexion of creation with its origin. For, as we saw, the result of the disturbance of this connexion was the



emasculatation and weakening of the created world, the loss of the original full power. If the dynamic view of the world, of which an exposition is to be found in my book on *Christian Faith and Natural Science*<sup>1</sup> is true, then the ultimate issue of all struggle for power and impotence is the tangible realisation (*Gestaltwerdung*) of the will, that is to say corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*). There is no seizure of power which does not assume physical form. Not until we have thoroughly realised this do we understand the message of Easter. To Greek thought, which the first witnesses of the Resurrection met in all the cultural centres of the ancient world, the message of Easter therefore was bound to appear folly. A man who lives by the Platonic view of the world, that is to say one who distinguishes between the eternal ego and his ideas on the one hand and the current of changing phenomena on the other hand, must regard the fate of the physical empirical world as ultimately irrelevant. Although the waves of world battle may surge high and break the whole physical world to pieces, and also destroy my own body completely, all this does not affect my inner being. The "true Being" (*ὄντως ὄν*) is safe in the supra-temporal sphere.<sup>2</sup> "I myself will hover over the remains of my body and its death will be a spectacle to me" (Fichte). The intellectual *bourgeoisie* which even now lives in this static distinction between the spiritual and the physical world could therefore never understand why at one time for the National Socialists the great thing was to conquer the street, why they were not content to fight for their new view of life "with spiritual weapons". Precisely this attitude of the educated *bourgeoisie* at the critical moment has given us a practical reminder of the fundamental error contained in the Platonic contrast between mind and body. It is true, as demonstrated in *God Transcendent*,<sup>3</sup> that the ego is not objective, but this does not mean, as Idealist philosophy imagined, that it is supra-temporal. On the contrary its existence is entirely an existence within time. It is part of the

<sup>1</sup> Karl Heim, *Der christliche Glaube und die Naturwissenschaft*, Hamburg 1949, Engl. trans. *Christian Faith and Natural Science*, by Neville Horton Smith, London 1953. Cf. Karl Heim, *Glaube und Denken*, 2nd edn., Berlin 1934, pp. 116ff, 179ff; Engl. trans. *God Transcendent* by E. P. Dickie, London 1935 (pp. 111ff, 181ff).

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaed.*, 70ff; *Phaed.*, 245ff; *Rep.* x, 611ff; *et passim*.

<sup>3</sup> *Glaube und Denken*, p. 124 (127).

undecided fluid state of a world in transition, of a *becoming* (*Weltwerden*) that is on its way to a *having-become* (*Gewordensein*). What we call spirit, mind, soul, will, can only by abstraction be separated from the surging and striving process of the world. We have regarded an abstract notion as a thing and isolated it by imagining that the ego could stand on the banks of the river of time as an idle spectator watching it pass by. Whatever metaphysical background the ego may have, in this world it exists only as the starting point of actions which take effect in objective space. Every thought exists only as the embryonic preliminary stage of a deed. Every act of the will exists only as the strong but as yet unrealised urge for tangible realisation. The will does not come to rest until that which was willed has taken objective form. A simple man with the natural instinct for power that is in our blood gets an instinctive impression of weakness if a movement with its ideas retires into the "spiritual world" in order to build systems in the clouds while leaving material reality to itself. This is a weak compromise with the hard reality which one cannot master. "Thoughts can easily live together. But bodies hit each other hard." The battle is fought in the narrow space of corporeality. Here alone can the victory be won. Even if mere inanimate objects constrain and oppress me, if for example I rebel against the door of my cell and attempt to smash it with my boots, or if I try to tear the rope with which I have been tied, yet I notice at once in this struggle that I am not fighting mere inanimate matter but a hidden power on account of which this matter is there anew every moment. Every physical object, a rope which ties me, or a tile which falls on my head represents, dynamically speaking, a piece of active power. On account of a certain energy this object maintains for a certain time its shape in spite of any destructive influences. The physical form disintegrates, melts, crumbles or weathers away as soon as energies are present which are stronger than the power which holds this form together. We therefore experience even the struggle with inorganic bodies in a manner similar to that with living beings which threaten our existence, e.g. with lions before which we have been thrown in the arena or with gladiators who want to overcome us in combat. Any serious contest for power in this world is therefore a battle between bodies in which a will



desires to take shape and to maintain itself at the expense of all other wills which also want to take shape.

This brings us back to the point where the message of Easter begins. If power never consists merely of thoughts and acts of will but in the physical effect of a non-objective urge, then the impotence which arises from our farness from God is always a limitation of physical realisation, a frustration of our will taking shape. The severed connexion with the *original* power of the Creator of the world is consequently expressed by the tragic fact that everywhere in creation a formative will is alive which stops at nothing but aims at infinite expansion because it is of divine origin, and yet at every point this urge has only limited power at its disposal. That is why it cannot produce any form capable of filling all space and shaping it according to one idea. This is how the condition arises which we all know. Everywhere forms are created every one of which contains the divine urge within itself to reproduce its shape infinitely. Every kind of plant, if it did not meet with resistance, would cover the whole earth; a couple of rabbits when left to themselves on a desert island where they meet no enemies will populate the island within a few years. Every species wants to conquer the whole world for itself. And every race, if it were not checked by enemies, would spread over the whole globe. But none of them have the strength to overcome all their opponents and to materialise their will of realisation. That is how the unceasing battle comes into being, the struggle of the organisms for the space of the world. Life can grow only by the repression and destruction of life. Bodies can come into being only by the consumption of bodies.

But, lest the picture become one-sided, we must not for a moment forget the paradoxical fact, emphasised in *Jesus the Lord*,<sup>4</sup> that if we are in communion with God, then we realise that even this tragic phenomenon of mutual displacement due to an *original* sin is a sacred ordinance of God for the present aeon. Even if in this battle between two conflicting forms we are crushed as between two millstones this death can be to us a form of service to God. With gratitude we return to the Creator the life that He has entrusted to us for a certain time, like Paul to whom his execution was a "libation" spent in

<sup>4</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, p. 140 (126).

the sacrificial service which consists in the faith of the Church.<sup>5</sup> But the abnormal thing is precisely this, that none of us weak men is capable of holding easily and unceasingly to this unqualified "yes" to the whole struggle for existence in the most difficult hours of life. Beside the first comprehensive view that we see with the pure eyes of unquestioning faith there is always, as a second possibility, the other comprehensive view that inescapably forces itself on us as soon as God disappears from our sight even for only one moment. In this second comprehensive view the battle between men and nations in the limited space of this world seems to us to be a senseless self-laceration of creation. That this second view of the world is possible at all, that under the impression of the reality which surrounds us we keep reverting to it, shows that this reality does not yet represent a full realisation of the divine will but is as yet a frustrated life that continually hampers itself, a battle between limited powers for their materialisation.

If therefore there is an ultimate triumph of God over the opposing movement which has disturbed creation, then it is not sufficient if a "realm of personal spirits" is established which hover above the ruins of the perishable physical world in blessed calm. This would mean that God had surrendered to the powers which fight to shape the physical world. He would then have withdrawn from the hard world of facts to the supratemporal sphere where thoughts and unrealised ideas "easily live together", as long as they make no claim on material reality. If God is to have the final say in world events then his will must materialise. It must present itself as a completed form, delivered of all the limitations which on account of farness from God and the tragic law of mutual displacement frustrate the full development of physical materialisation in the present condition of the world. Only from this point of view do we realise the value of the Resurrection of Christ and understand that every one who saw it was himself born a second time on account of this Resurrection. The Resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the perfected physical life of which the entire existing physical world is merely a shadowy preliminary stage. The disciples therefore who had the privilege of seeing the Risen One really did see something tremendous that cannot be

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, p. 139 (125).



described by human language. Of the women who stood by the empty tomb and had some idea of what had happened it is said: they "fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them" (Mk. xvi.8); Paul, when he was surrounded by the light of the glory of the Risen One, fell to the ground and for three days was without sight, and neither ate nor drank (Acts ix.3-9). It is understandable that the reports of the witnesses are extraordinarily contradictory. Jesus said to Thomas: "Put out your hand, and place it in my side" (Jn. xx.27), and again to Mary: "Do not hold me!" (Jn. xx.17). The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognise Him at all when He walked beside them, so much had He changed. And when they did recognise Him He vanished out of their sight (Lk. xxiv.13-35). One can gather from these inconsistencies that the disciples were not able to describe what they had seen. But they knew that in a small space for a little while they had been granted a view into the Reality which contained the destiny of the whole world to come, the future of nature and the world of men.

No one can imagine by himself what form creation would have if the barrier of death which continuously limits and narrows all things were removed. For nature and human life are unceasingly frustrated by the barrier of death, by the necessity of killing life in order to maintain oneself. The eagle comes flying down on a lamb, the spider holds a fly that has been caught in its web in deadly embrace, the ichneumon is after a grub which should actually grow to become a butterfly. But if only for once we catch a mere glance of the inexhaustible riches and fertility of the vegetable and animal kingdom of a primeval forest like that of the Amazon, for example, or, to take an example from an entirely different sphere, if we see how in spite of all the frustrations of his outward circumstances the partly blind choirmaster of St Thomas' Church in Leipzig, Johann Sebastian Bach, created a musical world the remaining fragments of which have delighted mankind for centuries to such an extent that people cannot hear enough of it, then we must be astonished again and again at the fullness of life and the creative power which issue from this world although on all sides it is limited and overshadowed by death. Then we may perhaps some time arrive at the thought: what a fullness of

life would break forth from creation if this barrier which still keeps the current of power in check were done away with!

When Paul had seen the risen Lord he could express the new existence which shone around him only with a faltering voice when he spoke the three words the content of which we can only guess: imperishableness (*ἀφθαρσία*), glory (*δόξα*), power (*δύναμις*). Under the impression of the Risen One all that had been so far, however glorious, the pyramids of Egypt built by an entire nation, the golden house of Nero in which all the treasures of the world were amassed, the rage of the surging sea which breaks the largest ships like mere nutshells, appeared to him as mere shadows of true Reality, as mere weakness and impotence. As all artificial light, even the glaring illuminated advertisements of a city square, is put in the shade as soon as the morning comes and the daylight breaks, all the glitter of the world disappeared from his sight as soon as the Risen Lord rose before him like a sun. The witnesses of the Resurrection had the impression that so far they had not known at all what life and bodily existence actually is. The bodies which we know can be burnt to ashes and scattered in the Rhône, as was done to the martyrs of Lyon. They can be pulverised in the air, as it was done at one time in the darkest days of colonial history, when cruel conquerors tied rebellious natives to the muzzle of a gun so that after the firing of the shot no remains were left. But here we are confronted with true bodily existence which God alone can create and which is imperishable. Paul therefore, who was the last witness to the Resurrectoin, can only make the possibility of the miracle of the Resurrection comprehensible to the Corinthians by pointing to God's *original* creative power which even in the created world which we know produces without effort an inexhaustible abundance of forms. You fool, he says, just look at the tremendous realm of nature, look at the grain of wheat out of which the plant grows, look at the quadrupeds, the birds, the fishes, the terrestrial bodies and the shining formations of the starry sky. God's work is a continuous destroying and continuous creating of ever new forms (1 Cor. xv.36-41). God who has such abundant possibilities of materialisation is not only capable of producing the kind of material existence, the substance of which is now being examined by nuclear physics. God's abundant power can also



be materialised in a completely new form for which we have no analogy in the present world and which therefore is not available for scientific analysis. God can create a material existence which is no longer subject to the mortal law of mutual displacement, that is to say a substance which is tangible and is yet capable of passing through locked doors. Christ can appear to the disciples on the road to Emmaus in full reality and yet suddenly disappear, that is to say, as Merezhkovsky expresses it, He can move from our three dimensions into the fourth.<sup>6</sup>

That organic bodily existence as we know it is mere "weakness", that is to say, has not reached its ultimate realisation, is demonstrated particularly by the fact that the bodies which we know are not capable of making their reality felt to such an extent that no one can escape from it. We only have to move far enough away from a person and he disappears from our senses and we escape from the impression he makes. The new bodily existence, however, of the Risen One is capable of overcoming with inescapable force all spatial limitations which prevent us from making ourselves felt. The Risen One is independent of any distance in space. He appears to the disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem and afterwards many miles away on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, He accompanies the lonely travellers on the road to Emmaus and envelops Saul in His glorious light near Damascus. The chosen witnesses therefore already now receive a vision of the power radiating through all space, in which Christ will appear at the end of the world "as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other" so that "every eye will see Him". This new bodily existence therefore has a relation to space entirely different from that of our present body in which we are only capable of making ourselves felt to those nearest us. We cannot imagine what kind of physical existence this will be. We cannot compare it to anything belonging to our present existence, not even with spiritualist materialisations or so-called astral bodies. What we do understand is only what Paul says in the chapter on the Resurrection, viz. that God who has created such an abundance of bodies of various character is capable of creating a new bodily existence as yet unknown to us.

<sup>6</sup> Merezhkovsky, *Tod und Auferstehung*.

## CHAPTER 19

### *The Meaning of the Resurrection of Christ for Our Present Life*

WHAT MEANING does, after all this, the event of the Resurrection have for our present life? The Resurrection of Christ is in the first place God's great "yes" to life as contrasted to any autumnal hankering after Nirvana. At the end of the chapter on the Resurrection (1 Cor. xv.55-8) Paul sums up what he had realised when he saw the Risen One in these words: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? . . . But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" One can understand this triumphant jubilation only if one looks first at the dark background against which the newly gained victory is seen. This dark background is in the words "the victory of death" (*νίκος τοῦ θανάτου*). If we look at reality as it forces itself upon us without the glorifying veil with which Idealism has enveloped it, reality as biologists, physicians, zoologists and scientists see it, then indeed we must say, what gives the cosmic process its character is the fact that in spite of all the glorious and wonderful things which this world produces death ultimately gains the victory over everything. The sun which gives life to all things on earth is no longer in its first stage of white heat. It has already lost the largest part of its heat to space. The cosmic process is inexorably heading for glacial death. If this process continues in the same way then one day the moment must come when the last men huddled together in ice and snow will warm themselves by the last piece of coal. As individuals and as nations we fight an heroic battle against the power of death which is after our lives. We all seek to preserve and to salvage what can be salvaged by legislation to prevent epidemics from spreading, by measures to increase the birth rate, by welfare work for poor families where the death rate is highest. Medical science works feverishly to preserve precious life as long as possible. All this



merits the greatest effort. It is always a triumph of man whenever one succeeds by a new operation in keeping alive people who seemed to be sure victims of death. But eventually death gets the better of everyone. Death is like an avalanche whose rumbling thunder the inhabitants of the valley hear with terror and which threatens to bury everything that lies in its way. One attempts to stop it by ramming rods into the ground and fixing beams to them. But it is not to be stopped. What do all those human speculations concerning life after death, what do all the demonstrations of the immortality of the soul which Plato put together in the *Phaedo* amount to in the face of the victorious power of death? All those demonstrations and postulates of immortality are mere scaffolding erected by us men to check the avalanche of death. No one today who has seen other people die seriously believes any longer in the superiority of the ego over the decay of his body. We have a vague but sinister feeling that approaching death hits us in the very centre of our being and hurls our mind with itself into the abyss.

The oppressive thing about this avalanche of death which threatens everything is not that we may perhaps be heading for a painful death. The present generation accepts death as something natural that stands to reason and to which one does not pay too much attention. The real burden is not death itself but the shadow which death casts on our entire present life. For if eventually death is to gain the ultimate victory, if we together with all that battles and struggles around us are going into the night in which no one can work, then this is of course a reminder that we should live as keenly as possible in order to fill the precious time with the greatest possible content. And yet the end for which we are heading casts an icy shadow on all that we do. For that which is approaching with inevitable certainty is in a sense already there. Of all that we do it holds good what the hero in Goethe's *Iphigenie* says on his way to death: "It is the path of death on which we tread; with every step my soul falls more silent."<sup>1</sup> If nothingness eventually absorbs all things, is there anything at all that is of absolute importance? Soon it will be all the same anyway. All our big words are swallowed up by eternal silence. But can we then

<sup>1</sup> J. W. von Goethe, *Iphigenie in Tauris*, Act II, sc. i.

take those words really seriously? If we really fervently love something and sacrifice ourselves for it we cannot bear the thought that some time it will perish for ever. In this way it was to many people an absolutely necessary and inevitable expression of their love of Germany when they spoke of "*ewiges Deutschland*", "eternal Germany". They simply could not fathom the thought that one day someone would be able to say the same thing about this nation as was once said about Troy: "Once the day will come when sacred Ilium is destroyed."<sup>2</sup> If we have staked our lives for this nation then we cannot bear this thought. But if we are completely honest we must say that unless something happens that changes the whole condition of the world completely we can neither by our fervent love nor by our heroism check the avalanche of death which eventually buries also our love and hope and faith. When during one of the recent eruptions of Mount Vesuvius the stream of lava threatened a village the childishy credulous inhabitants formed a procession and carried images of the saints to meet the stream in order to check it. But the stream of death rolled on without taking any notice of their faith. If death is victor then the masses of lava destroy all that is great and sacred to us, even our idealism and our faith in the future; all things eventually become the victims of merciless destruction.

We had to make it quite clear to ourselves what the apostle meant by the "victory of death", this inexorable law of "perishableness" by which all that is young today has to grow old and wither tomorrow. Only then can we gather what it means to our lives when the apostle contrasts the triumph of death with the one fact that places the whole condition of the world on a new basis: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. xv.20). What does this mean? One man alone went in the power of God to meet the advancing avalanche of death; and it was unable to overcome Him, for He was stronger. He was the only One who had not, like the others, fallen away from communion with the Father. And this only One in whom the whole power of God dwelt at the last moment robbed death of its victory while it was already sure of its final triumph. This means that for us who have met the Risen One the old philo-

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, bk. iv, l. 164.



sophy of death, according to which all that struggles around us and in us is heading for eternal destruction, has been replaced by a new contrasting view of life according to which life has the final say. We together with all that lives and strives around us are heading for the light. If the future belongs to light, if life carries away the final victory, then no work is in vain that aims at preserving men's lives and giving them work lest they perish. For life is something sacred that has an eternal future. If the philosophy of death were right then all that is done by hygiene and medical science in order to save and preserve life is merely an attempt to delay for a short while the triumph of death, of which eventually everything becomes the victim anyway. But it is exactly the other way about. It is true that death and the host of diseases obstruct the work by which life is preserved and cared for. But this interrupts only for a short while the development that leads to the final triumph of life. The power of death cannot prevent the victory of life. If we take a stand, no matter where, for the creation and preservation of life then we fight at the side of the victor.

The second "yes" implied in the fact of the Resurrection is the positive attitude to the body and to the earth from which we have come. Neither in Greek sculpture, which produced Phidias' Zeus, nor in the physical culture and sporting life of our times do we find a higher appreciation of the body than that contained in the word of the apostle (1 Cor. vi.19): "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own." This means in the first place a positive attitude to this earth from which our body has come forth. It also means a fundamental "yes" to all the primary forms of the realisation of the will. From the very beginning the witnesses of the Resurrection were opposed to the Platonic separation between the immortal spirit and mortal bodily existence. That is to say they fought against the point of view which in the later days of the ancient world and afterwards in the days of rationalism and enlightenment produced rootless cosmopolitans and aristocrats of the mind.

But if as a result of the Resurrection we thus affirm all forms of realisation of the will, in personal and racial physical manifestations, it is not the total response of a young man who is

intoxicated with life and has not yet looked into its depths. The "yes" which the messengers of the Risen One say to the earth and to physical existence has passed through a "no". The source of this "no" has been discussed in *Jesus the Lord*.<sup>3</sup> We saw there that we cannot consider the ego that has lost its immediate relationship to God apart from the condition of the present world as a whole. For "I" and the objective world belong inseparably together as contrasting poles which cannot exist without one another. The ego however has been drawn into the satanic rebellion against God. On account of this the objective world too, of which the ego is the invisible background and counter-pole, carries an unsolved contradiction within itself. Two contradictory comprehensive views thus arise. The first dawns on us when we rest in the bosom of the Father and are granted the "*Zentralblick*", the "eye to see the centre" (Jakob Boehme) to which all that happens in the world becomes transparent, so that we see that all things come from God, that God is in all things ultimately the sole agent, even in the most terrible catastrophes which destroy thousands of human lives, even in the most cruel persecutions which disrupt the Church. But no one is capable of really holding to this high vision exclusively. For we have all been drawn into the rebellion against God. That is why from our own experience the contrasting comprehensive view necessarily forces itself on us over and over again. We have to regard all that happens as a contest between God and the demoniacal powers whose reality we see only too clearly because we ourselves are still under their sway. As long as the dark power is not yet robbed of its strength, reality in its deepest essence will remain open to two interpretations. The contrast between the two aspects under which we have to see reality is unsolved. All the organic forms of this world, the miracle of life and of the human body, carry the whole glory of God's creation within themselves; and yet in their present form they are in constant danger of becoming demoniacal instruments of rebellion against God. The "yes" to the earth and to all creatures contained within it therefore is a "yes" that has passed through a "no". This "yes" that has passed through a "no", however, is a deeper and more complete "yes" than the intoxicated "yes" of a shallow optimism

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 139ff (124ff).



that does not yet know the abysmal depths of life. A heady affirmation of life is shattered by the first serious disappointment with which life confronts us. The "yes" to the world and to physical existence which the witnesses of the Risen One carried through the world did not break up when they became victims and were cast out by the world.

The "no" that is behind the positive attitude to life which belongs to faith in the Resurrection is contained in the words of a decisive text in the chapter on the Resurrection: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv.50). This earth cannot be developed into the final state of the Kingdom of God along straight lines. It can only be "changed" by God into this final state (1 Cor. xv.51). Change however is not destruction but a transformation by which everything receives a new form without anything being lost. II Pet. iii.7, 10 says: "The heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire . . . the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up." That is to say the present world is like a piece of metal that is thrown into a smelting furnace not to be destroyed but to be changed. From the same matter a new heaven and a new earth will arise. Nothing will be lost but it will all be recast.

To conclude by summarising the practical meaning of faith in the Resurrection, the foregoing has shown us two things:

1. Genuine and undivided love and devotion for this earth and the physical existence of the individual and the community can arise only from faith in the risen Christ. For only a love which does not revel in unrealities but confines itself to reality can be genuine. Any love which does not honestly face the fact that even with the highest that we have we are men who are doomed to death, must have some illusions as regards reality because otherwise it simply could not exist. But any love which lives on an enthusiastic idealisation cannot hold out when the great disillusionment comes. Our love for our people can face a catastrophe which threatens our whole existence only if we know that even this people is subject to sin and death, but that God has raised Jesus Christ and robbed death of its power, and that therefore this people too stands in the light of the ultimate victory which God has given us through Jesus Christ.

2. But then a second point must be stated just as emphati-

cally as the first. Our confession of the Risen One is not genuine if it does not immediately and naturally place us in an attitude of responsibility for the terrestrial reality in which we find ourselves according to God's ordinance. For the event of the Resurrection cuts off any escape into spiritual or religious worlds above and beyond, Plato's world of ideas as well as a "heaven" conceived of as a higher "storey" above the world and independent of it. If the way out into a spiritual beyond were open to us, if there were such a refuge above the clouds to which we can rise after death without caring about what happens on this earth, then there would have been no need for the whole tremendous battle which was brought to a victorious ending by the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. But no such Platonic cloud-cuckoo land exists. Everything is decided in this world. Our individual destiny cannot be separated from the destiny of this earth, the destiny of our race and the destiny of all mankind of which our race is part. We cannot jump out of the train in which we are heading for the future together with others for whom we are in part responsible. The reality of the Resurrection therefore can be experienced only in working for our fellows with whom we are bound up. If we do not transpose the power of the risen Christ into action then we live in an illusion.

If faith in the Resurrection is placed in this great context then the fact that the Christian Church celebrated the message of Easter as the fulfilment of the myth of nature dying in winter and waking up to new life in spring is not incidental but is full of meaning. Similarities between the message of Easter and certain vegetation myths led the critical school of theology to regard the whole testimony concerning the Resurrection of Christ on the third day as a development of the myth of the dead and risen god of spring. In reality the relation is the other way round. This myth is an expression of the unfulfilled longing that finds its fulfilment only in the fact of Easter. This is particularly clear in the Germanic myth of the death and resurrection of Baldr. The blind, envious Hödr has thrown a mistletoe bough at Baldr. Baldr falls to the ground, and light disappears from the world. Baldr is received in the underworld by the gloomy Hel. But Frigga descends to Hel and asks for her son back. Then the goddess of darkness lets



herself be persuaded and Baldr is allowed to return to the earth in spring and again to spread his light that gives light to all. But not for long. For every winter he has to descend to the underworld and so on continually in eternal change, as long as the earth exists.<sup>4</sup> This Germanic myth of spring shows even more clearly than its more southern forms that the condition of the world carries within itself an unfulfilled longing which becomes perceptible in the inescapable periodical change between a short summer in which everything comes to life and nature's long torpor of winter. There are here only two possibilities; either this longing remains unfulfilled for ever, or it is fulfilled. But the latter can be the case only if there is a final victory of life over death, that is to say if the world is heading for a new situation in which the periodical alternation of flourishing and dying, as expressed in all the myths of spring, will cease for ever and a new cosmic spring will set in which has no end. This ultimate victory of life, however, exists only if the great Victor has come who has death behind Him once and for all. If this victory has really been gained, then the Easter celebrated by the woods and the fields is in fact the first dawning light of the change in the world which will come when the shadow of the winter of death has withdrawn from creation. And this deep word is true: *Natura spirat resurrectionem*, nature breathes the resurrection.

<sup>4</sup> S. Sturlason, *The Prose Edda*, trans. A. G. Brodeur, New York 1916, pp. 70ff.

## CHAPTER 20

### *The Public Seizure of Power by Christ*

WE HAD TO SPEAK at such length about the meaning and the import of the Resurrection of Christ because it is the only stage of the end which presents itself to us as a completed event and which can therefore be discussed at some length. The other stages of the end are still in the dark bosom of the future. Christ merely hinted at them. He told us only so much about them as we absolutely have to know in order to stand firm in the present battle. A dramatic poet does not present to us the destiny that fills a whole human life in the epic length of a biography. He takes only a few scenes full of dramatic tension which illuminate the course of what happens as in a flash. In the same way Jesus gives us no extensive picture of the final events. He shows us only a few scenes of the final drama which form dramatic climaxes, as for example the scene where all those who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of man, or that other scene which He depicts so vividly that we can never forget it, where the Judge of the world gathers all the nations around Him and pronounces a verdict at which both parties, the blessed as well as the damned, are extremely amazed (Mt. xxv. 31-46). Before and after these culminating points in the history of the end Jesus lets the curtain drop. All the questions which we would ask about the course of events between those dramatic main events remain unanswered. It is to no purpose if we attempt to fill the gaps with the aid of our own imagination. For the future is not determined by our needs or by the speculations of our philosophy of history but only by God's plan. It is therefore useless for us to construe or to postulate something. It is part of our obedience to Christ as our Leader that we refrain from desiring to know more than what He himself has told us concerning the future. We shall learn it all in good time. But every detail of the brief hints which Jesus does give concerning the future is important



as a compass for our understanding of the present condition of the world. The last events which Jesus announces are nothing other than a direct continuation of the first of the last events, which has already taken place in the Resurrection.

Therefore the first event yet to come is the public seizure of power by the King who was crucified by the world and ascended the throne at the right hand of God in secret. Jesus proclaims to the High Priest that He will come with the clouds of heaven as the Ruler prophesied in the Book of Daniel who is to make an end of all the empires of the world. "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (Mt. xxv.31). In the parables this event is vividly depicted, e.g. Mt. xxv.6: "But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'" That is to say suddenly the rumour goes through the world like wildfire that the One has come who was expected by a small circle of people while all the others had not expected His coming at all any more. The wise maidens have eagerly looked forward to Him. The others, like the servants to whom, according to another parable, He had entrusted His house, have behaved like the suitors in the house of Odysseus. Because He stayed away for such a long time they thought that He would not return at all. But whether men have expected Him with burning hearts, or whether they have rejected the prophecies of His second advent as a Jewish myth and as a dogma of the Church determined by the thought of the age, or whether they have dissolved it into a dialectical relationship, suddenly, Jesus announces, this whole discussion will be cut short by His appearing Himself. "After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (Mt. xxv.19). This advent will be such that all men, even His fanatical opponents, will recognise Him at once and no longer resist Him. "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man" (Mt. xxiv.27). That is to say, as lightning all at once lights up the whole landscape as clearly as daylight, the second coming of the Son of man will make itself noticed at every point in the world, so that there can be no more doubt concerning His governing authority.

Why is this public seizure of power necessary? Why is it not

enough for a realm of invisible spirits to live on in blessed communion with Him far from the bustle of the world? Why cannot a purely spiritual judgment that takes place only in the inward being of the people who have resisted God be substituted for that public seizure of power which Jesus announced according to the reports of the New Testament? Erich Winkel speaks of this inner judgment when he says: "The 'Father' leaves them to themselves until sooner or later, broken and unsuccessful, they recognise that their human autonomy cannot satisfy them, until of their own accord they long for this peace and love and return home like the prodigal son. . . . This is Jesus' doctrine of 'hell'. They already taste hell on their own account, because they have excluded themselves from the love of the Father and worship as their ruling gods their human, physical and spiritual passions, which devour them as sacrifices for their gifts."<sup>1</sup>

We can argue like this only if the Platonic view of the relation between the ego and the world is tenable, if it were possible to hover as a disembodied spirit in a supra-polar sphere and to renounce all claims in connexion with the physical world. Then bodily resurrection would be an unnecessary event which takes physical existence far too seriously and attributes to it an importance which it can only have for unmitigated materialism. Then the judgment too could take place entirely within the spiritual sphere. But, as we have said before, this Platonic philosophy is from its very beginning mistaken and unfitted for life. That is why it is instinctively rejected by warlike men. For in battle the conquest of visible reality is at stake. There has never yet been a power which did not inevitably express itself in widely visible buildings, monuments, temples, halls, cathedrals, castles, palaces, in uniforms, processions, marches and flags. Similarly every power has the strong desire to exclude an opposing power from visible realisation, to prevent any public manifestation of it. There is an inner necessity in all this. For becoming visible, being seen by everybody, is the form by which all, even those who are stubbornly opposed to a movement or have taken no notice of it, are forced to make a decision. That which hits everybody's eyes, which no one can escape, does not allow of any neutrality. That which remains merely a spiritual movement shows precisely by this fact that

<sup>1</sup> Winkel, *Jesus der Sohn*, pp. 128ff.



it is a negligible quantity. It has to leave visible realisation to other, stronger powers.

Therefore Christ has only two possibilities open to Him. Either the Son "who is in the bosom of the Father" (Jn. I.18) must forever limit Himself to the spiritual work of the sower by which He confronts the small circle of those whom He can reach in this way with a decision. He "leaves" the other people "alone" "until they return of their own accord". If they do not wish to do so He leaves them to their fate. Even after His death He is content to show Himself in a vision only to a few faithful followers. If this is Jesus' attitude then He has capitulated in the battle for visible realisation and has ceded the realm of visible manifestation to the power of destruction directed against God. He has not succeeded in entering "the strong man's house" and plundering his "goods" (Mk. III.27). He has had to leave him his best tool, viz. public propaganda. Or, on the other hand, God has the final say. He authorises the establishment of the Kingdom of God "in power". Then the tremendous thing must happen that Christ announced in solemn words when He was standing a prisoner before His judges. There must be a solution of the contradiction which is already contained in the fact that He who could command in the name of God has to invite people in these words: "Come to me all who labour and are heavy-laden." – "Will you also go away?" (Mt. XI.28; Jn. VI.67). That in itself is already contradictory to what Christ is and means. It is as if a man born to be king, an absolute monarch, has to canvass for the love of his subjects and must plead: Do please obey my commandments! If He is God's Plenipotentiary then the canvassing and pleading that is characteristic of the first advent of Jesus must be replaced by something else, viz. the conquest of the realm of visibility, the public decision of the question of power.

Everyone who has taken a stand in the battle for God knows that now as ever there is only this either-or, and that any attempts to find a solution along a middle course between the two points of view are proving more and more impossible. For we no longer fall for the illusion which seemed to be suggested by the glorious story of the martyrs of the first centuries. We no longer believe that martyrdom for God's sake at any event had an intrinsic value and would live on in history as a

shining example of heroic sacrifice for a great end, even if there were no ultimate victory of God to expect. The battle for visible realisation has become harder than it was in the first centuries. The power of the enemy has long since found out that it must do everything to rob faith in God of the final triumph which the martyr gains in public. In the present age of martyrdom the martyr no longer dies in the arena in a public fight with wild beasts before thousands of spectators or at the stake where all the bystanders can hear his last prayers. He dies a lonely death in the cellars of the secret police, so that no one can find his dismembered body in order to place his bones as a sacred relic in an altar, or he perishes with cold or hunger together with hundreds of nameless people and is buried in a common grave while no one even knows his name.

The question therefore is put much more clearly and sharply now than in the first centuries, the question implied in Baron Pahlen's repeated cry in Dwinger's description of the death march of three hundred men from the Baltic: "No God who comes down to interfere,"<sup>2</sup> or the question asked by the young farmer Kindermann when he sees the two unknown ministers lying face downward, one with a wooden cross, the other with a New Testament in his hands: "Again and again you hear that pastors are slain, again and again you find them. . . . Why has God become so weak?"<sup>3</sup> Here is only a simple either-or. Either this unnoticed torturing to death of hundreds of thousands of unknown soldiers of God does in fact take place to no purpose; no one is strengthened by it, no one hears about it, it is a pointless slaughter that remains unnoticed and does not become apparent anywhere. Then we can no longer understand "to what purpose this globe moves".<sup>4</sup> Or the hour must come when all things come to light. But we ourselves cannot decide about this either-or with which the present situation of the world confronts us. All our combined longing cannot draw down the power of heaven to earth. The decision can only come from God, through an act of power which completes the work of atonement. The longing therefore that lived in the hearts of the early Church of martyrs continually found expression in the words which Paul wrote with his own hand

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Erich Dwinger, *Die letzten Reiter*, Jena 1935, pp. 102ff.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 280.

<sup>4</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 417.



under his letters in order to strengthen the Church: "*Maran Atha*", "our Lord comes", or, as one can also translate it, "our Lord, come" (1 Cor. xvi.22). The Revelation of John, too, which was written under the impression of the time of persecution under Nero ends with this saying (Rev. xxii.20); "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" The certainty regarding the second coming of Jesus was the strength of the *ecclesia militans* by which she was kept alive even at times when it seemed as if God had mercilessly abandoned His Church to the cruelty of her enemies.

It is just as impossible for us as it was for the early Church to get a clear picture of how this advent of Christ is to ensue. For this event cannot be a direct continuation of present history. It cannot appear at the end of world history as the mature fruit of a rising development. If that were the case, then it would be possible for us to picture it with the aid of the present state of the world. But the present condition of the world, which the second advent of Jesus is to end, has a completely different character from the state which begins with the coming of Jesus. In the present age, as we have seen, God for certain reasons restrains His power. He Himself thereby releases the fury of rebellion directed against Him. Consequently the revolt to which God gives room is so strong that it does not consist merely of localised insurrections which flare up here and there but have no connexion with one another. On the contrary the strength of the opposing movement consists in the fact that it is led from a central headquarters according to a master plan. If this centralised process is not checked at once, if God gives it an opportunity to develop between the Cross and the perfecting of the world, then this must lead to what is becoming increasingly manifest in world history. Because the satanic movement is centrally led it has the tendency to concentrate into a uniform terrestrial power that has a tremendous impetus and that systematically pursues with all the means at its disposal the one aim of destroying the Church of the risen Christ and making any public manifestation of life impossible to her. The more time and room God gives to this rebellion, the more it has to centralise and increase like an avalanche to become an organisation of power embodying hatred of God and Christ.

Jesus foretold this development when He spoke of a final severe persecution of the Church in which "false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mk. XIII.22). In the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians this is expressed even more clearly: the day of the Lord "will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God and object of worship (every so-called god and object of worship, R.S.V.), so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (II Thess. II.3-4). The visionary of the Revelation of John regards the Roman Imperial power under Nero as a first powerful concentration of the self-worshipping world power which threatens the Church of the risen Christ with destruction.

How rightly the early Church saw the trend of historical development has now become manifest to us since within the world of nations the contrast is becoming increasingly sharp between two fundamental points of view with contrasting attitudes to belief in God. According to the one God is the ultimate Reality to whom all moral obligations are related. According to the other point of view, which became very prominent in Hitler's state, faith in God is a reactionary mode of thought incompatible with the claims of a totalitarian State. In connexion with certain methods of destruction used during recent decades to deal with Christianity, one cannot help wondering why the police interfered at once when in some barracks some nuns among those condemned to death happened to meet some Evangelical Christians and consequently a spark of Christian faith began to burn? Surely such a thing could have no political reason. Those harmless people who were soon to die of exhaustion could surely not be dangerous to the State. If religion really is only opium for the people, why then did they not watch with pity how those tortured people escaped for a while into a world which they had built with their religious imagination? The systematic war of destruction which a self-worshipping world power waged against all that is called God and object of worship, even if belief in God was expressed only in politically completely harmless forms, can only be accounted for if there really is a satanical power whose hatred of God



flares up at once the moment it comes, in however moderate a form, into contact with Christ whom it regards as the mortal Enemy who has come to destroy it. As Luther once said in the controversy with Thomas Münzer: "Perhaps the devil feels the day of the end, that is why he thinks he had better disturb the dregs and prove the power of hell all at once."

If world history is not a movement of progress but rather tends to an increasing concentration of anti-christian power, then the second advent of Jesus for which the Church is praying is not a direct continuation and completion of world history but an event that comes from an entirely different dimension, that suddenly breaks off the preceding development and throws the whole constitution of the present world off its hinges. In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in the second chapter of Daniel, world power appears as a colossus made of gold, silver, brass and iron – that is to say of apparently indestructible material – but standing on feet of clay. The sudden change occurs when a stone, thrown by an invisible power, "by no human hand", comes rolling down. This smites the image on its feet and breaks them in pieces; and the whole colossus collapses. The wind carries it away like chaff from the summer threshing floors. "But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. ii.35). That is the first prophetic presentiment of what the New Testament Church expected of Jesus' second advent. We can speak only figuratively of this event which it is impossible to picture from the present relations of power in the world. We can summarise the event which Jesus predicted as follows: all the world powers which have so far battled in history will be robbed of power, and the One to whom God has given world dominion will come "with the clouds of heaven". Christ will come forth from the cloud of invisibility which has so far concealed Him and will assume world dominion. The little stone that struck the colossus of the world powers so that they were destroyed will become a great mountain and fill the whole earth.

## CHAPTER 21

### *The Great Final Settlement*

THE FIRST THING that the public accession to the throne implies is a settlement with all those who have taken a responsible part in preceding world history. If Christ really is to seize power then it is not enough that from a particular moment the future of the world should belong to Him, while all that has happened before is passed over in silence. It is not sufficient that by a general amnesty all that has gone before should be wiped out as with a sponge, as if nothing had happened. That would be only half a seizure of power. Then Christ would be laying claim only on those people who were living at the time of His coming, and waiving His claim on all the others who died earlier. That is to say the dominion of Christ is only complete if really every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. II. 11). This means that all who have ever lived are to stand before His throne and to acknowledge His royal power. The Son of man who went through the world canvassing and inviting now appears before mankind in a new form. He comes with the majesty of divine power as the One who has the destiny of the world in His hands. All men will "see him as he is" (1 Jn. III. 2). So far He has not been seen in His true reality. But now for the first time He appears in His true form and He can say: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. I. 17-18).

The first thing that must happen when Christ makes His claim on all men who have lived so far will be that He will act as a householder who returns home after a long time of absence and personally takes over his property the management of which he had entrusted to his servants. He will have to settle with all those who have managed his property for him. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (II Cor. V. 10). "His eyes" are "like a flame of fire" (Rev. I. 14). From



these eyes nothing can hide itself any longer. All things must be revealed. All dark designs and shady intrigues are mercifully brought to light. Every concealed spell is exposed. The death-rattle of the innocent victim pierces the ears of the murderer. The inaudible sighs uttered in dark dungeons are heard now. The innocent blood cries from earth to heaven. No one can think without trembling of this day which brings all things to light. And yet who could stand all the privations which have to be borne in silence, all the misrepresentations of the truth which have never been rectified, all the outrages to which an accused is exposed without any opportunity to reply – who could bear with all that without the firm certitude that the day of the great exposure and final settlement is coming?

But if this day is to come when all that is to be put right will be put in order, then all those who have responsibly taken part in world history must be present. If therefore God hands the judgment of the world to the Son of man then He must also give Him the power to call all people who have passed through the world back from the death by which they have been swallowed up. He who has so often invited people to salvation must now summon them to judgment. The Father “has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice” (Jn. v.28). That is to say even those who have never yet heard His voice, even those who all the days of their lives have refused to listen to it and drowned it in other voices will once hear this thundering voice that is loud enough to frighten them even out of the deepest sleep of death. At this thundering call, we read in the Revelation, “the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them” (Rev. xx.13). No sepulchre however deep can retain the dead when the last trump sounds.

How men can be called forth out of the power of death is something about which our present experience of the world can teach us nothing. It is only possible in virtue of the power of the Creator who has brought forth the present cosmic process and who alone is therefore capable of stopping it and making something new to happen that dispenses with all the laws of what has previously happened in the world. When the Corinthians ask (1 Cor. xv.35): “How are the dead raised? With

what kind of body do they come?" Paul gives a very simple reply in the chapter on the Resurrection. Certainly, if God did not exist, if He were not behind the whole of nature as the creative *original* power, then death would mean that we fall into nothingness. For no creature has the power within itself to continue itself by its own strength. But because God does exist we, when we are reduced to our own nothingness, fall into God's bosom. We return to the condition from which God can create anew. Our whole future together with the future of the whole creation rests on one foundation only: on God and His creative power. Our only hope is in God. This makes unnecessary all the apologetic scholarship that has been bestowed on salvaging an enduring essential element in man from the attacks of physical science. We can dispense with any proofs and postulates of immortality, and also with occult and spiritualist experiments. For either God does not exist, in which case even a continued existence after death, the possibility of still manifesting oneself for some time, does not get us very far – it can only be the last flickerings of a fire that is already burnt out, and eventually it ends in nothing. Or God does exist, and then the possibility of being called back from the nothingness in which we are submerged when we die is founded solely on Him. He "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. iv.17). He can leave us in nothingness if He chooses. But if by the voice of His Son He calls us from the grave to the great day of judgment then we cannot resist His power.

And what is the purpose of the public day of judgment to which the people of all nations and all times are called together? Is it God's purpose in this judgment to take vengeance on His enemies and to make them feel His power? That would be a merely negative purpose. But according to all that Jesus intimated about it the purpose of God's day is fully positive. The purpose is the election of a new mankind for the new world which God desires to create by the change of the old one. To the servant who used the property of his absent Lord to full advantage the Lord says: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt. xxv.21). The people therefore who have proved faithful during the time of



his bodily absence are not to be rewarded with the pleasures of paradise, as Mohammed promised his believers who died in holy war. On the contrary they will receive much larger tasks than those which they have already discharged. They will be "set over much". We learn from this what is the ultimate aim of the intervening time in which God remains silent and restrains His power while His people are dishonoured and ill-used. During this time the mass of humanity is to be examined in order to find the elect company which can be accepted as the crack troops of the Realm of the future. Only those are eligible who as real gold are proved in the fire of affliction. They are those people who under constant and growing pressure of the increasingly concentrated hostile power remain faithful at a lost post in the midst of general apostasy. They are those who know only one honour, that is to be worthy of their crucified King who said: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt. x.37). "Only he who conquers," says Christ, "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev. iii,12).<sup>1</sup>

How is this selection of mankind to be made? Jesus does not indicate any written code of law which will be taken and applied as the authoritative basis in the procedure of the last judgment in the same way as the prevailing code of law in the case of an earthly court. The decision depends on Christ alone. The Son of man who with His eyes of flame sees right through every man makes in divine righteousness the decision on which our eternal destiny depends. He is the One who separates the sheep from the goats. He only hints that with this final decision there will be great surprises. Men who have opposed and faced the world with the courage of a martyr and have said to Christ "Lord, Lord" will not all "enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. vii.21). To others, who have prophesied and cast out demons, and who have done many miracles in His name, the King will say: "I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers" (Mt. vii.23). Others have not known Christ at all, they have never been instructed in the Christian faith. But they have given food or drink or clothes to one of the least of His brothers

<sup>1</sup> "Only" is not in the text (Greek, German or English). The above rendering is a paraphrase by the author. Tr.

or have visited one of them in sickness or in prison. To their own amazement, without any preparation or instruction the King calls these men who were disciples of Christ without knowing it immediately into His Kingdom and says to them; "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt. xxv.40). As Christ once, after a night of lone conversation with His Father, by His own authority selected from the people around Him the disciples whom He wanted to send into the world, so now by the same authority He chooses from the mass of all the nations gathered around Him those men who during the long interval have proved victors by their deeds, and places them as changed men in a changed world.



## CHAPTER 22

### *The Perfecting of the World*

THIS BRINGS US to the last point in the divine order of the future of which Jesus speaks, even though He gives only summary hints. That is "God's harvest", the "consummation of the aeon" (*συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος*, Mt. XIII.49; "close of the age", R.S.V.). That is the change in the world which is inaugurated when in the last judgment the multitude of those who are ready for the greater task of the new world has been chosen. The great turn which inaugurates the change of the world is described in the Revelation in these words: "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying: 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God'" (Rev. XII.10). That is to say, now the opposing power which has so far hindered the perfecting of creation has been overcome. The spell in which the world was caught is broken. No guilt disturbs the relation between the Creator and creation any longer. If the Biblical view is right, then all relations must now fall into order and all questions must be solved on account of what God has done.

This first of all makes an end of the condition in which living forms of limited strength mutually dislodge and destroy one another. For now the current of power from the *original* source of life can again flow freely through creation. "Death shall be no more" (Rev. XXI.4). According to Paul the whole creation groans under the "bondage of decay" like a prisoner. The painful dying and having to kill that in the present age is the condition of all life, is like a continuous sad undertone which accompanies the jubilant high notes of life. This dissonance cries out for a solution. Only now, as the spell is lifted from creation, is the discord resolved. Jesus calls the state which then comes into being simply "life" (Mk. IX.43). This is the

life that is no longer hampered by the spell of death, the spring, the eternal youth that conquers the world. Together with repression of life, limitation of knowledge also ceases. For, as we have seen, the insuperable barrier which reality puts in the way of our scrutinising eyes and our understanding, is only the spiritual form of our impotence. The pure in heart, Jesus says, will see God (Mt. v.8). The ultimate depths of life will be open to their eyes. When communion with God is restored and every repression of life overcome, then suffering also will cease. For pain is merely the expression of friction between two living forms each of which has unlimited aspirations so that they are in each other's way. There shall be no "mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. xxi.4). When creation has been delivered from the bondage of decay then also the demoniacal devastation and ugly deformation of creation caused by sin and pain will cease. Creation will appear in pure beauty. Whenever the Old and the New Testament speak of the perfecting of the world they do not merely speak of power and bliss but also of brilliant light and glory (δόξα). The thirst for beauty will be satisfied. Every really great piece of music, every great work of art therefore is the morning light of eternity, a first dawn of the perfecting of the world. Immortal works of music, classical works of art are like the fir trees on the slopes of the mountain, whose tops are already in the light of the approaching morning while the valley is still covered in mist. In the Revelation it is said of the City of God: "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light" (Rev. xxi.23). We can only divine the meaning of this prophecy if we realise that the whole colourful beauty of the world around us consists only of broken rays of sunlight. This colourful beauty which has come from the sun is a foretaste of the perfecting of the world. It is the subdued light that in the present age in which God is as yet invisible takes the place which God Himself should occupy. Now for the first time the veil is lifted and God Himself becomes visible. He Himself becomes the sun in which creation shines in overwhelming splendour.

All this, of course, is merely a figurative and negative description of that new Thing that infinitely surpasses all that we can imagine. The only positive thing we can say about it is



what Paul sums up in the words: "Then God will be all in all" (1 Cor. xv.28; "everything to everyone", R.S.V.). This does not mean, as some have interpreted it, that all the forms and formations of this world will be submerged in God like rivers which discharge into the sea and lose their name and form. This is the world aim that the great Eastern religions of deliverance have in view. In the light of this aim all the battles of individuals and nations appear to be ultimately irrelevant. They merely touch the surface of the ocean. Deep down, however, the silence of *Original Unity*, the *coincidentia oppositorum* into which all contrasts discharge at the consummation of the world already prevails.

We can only be delivered from the captivating charm of this idea if we have thoroughly realised what we discussed in *Jesus the Lord*<sup>1</sup>: if we return behind all the world's contrasts of content and space to the original state of balance, then we have precisely not returned to God, as the mystics believe. On the contrary we are then still moving within the polar relations of this world. For the polar character of the whole world of "I-thou-it" in which we are placed does not only show itself in the fact that all the objective quantities with which we are dealing mutually condition one another, that is to say that every content in its quantitative and qualitative constitution is conditioned and determined by the existence of something else which is its counter-pole – think, for example, of rest and movement, colour and contrasting colour, pleasure and pain. Behind this first polar relation there is a second polarity by which it is conditioned. That is the contrast between the interdependent contrasts in the world on the one hand and on the other the point of indifference or state of balance from which the contrasts in the world ever arise and to which at all times they can return again. The colours of the rainbow, for example, are differentiations of the pure *original* light from which they have all come forth through refraction and to which they can all return. That the polarity of the world's contrasts is not eliminated in the state of indifference is experienced by everyone who attempts to find deliverance from the unrest of terrestrial relations by returning to this state of balance. All the mystics who by *yoga* exercises, for example, or by Buddhist contempla-

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 21ff, 46ff (11ff, 35ff).

tion, have sought to reach the state of balance, the pure *original* light that is behind all the colour contrasts of reality, have suffered from the fact that they could not manage to retain the state of indifference. I can never really get rid of myself. Therefore I must always return from the *original* unity in which the contrast between "I", "thou" and "it" is dissolved, to the tension between me and thee and the objective world which confronts us both. This restless oscillation between unity and multiplicity that the mystic experiences during his contemplation demonstrates the polar relation from which we can never escape by the mystical way to salvation.

If therefore it is said that God will be "all in all" then this cannot mean that all forms cease and the world returns to an existence without mode or form (*Weiselose*) in the "silent desert of the godhead" (Eckhart). For by this we should precisely not have got beyond the polar relations of the world. What the Scripture says of the perfecting of the world must therefore be clearly distinguished from this mystical understanding. The end of the world cannot be a cessation of the world by which everything is submerged in the *original* unity. And yet it cannot be a continuation of the present contest in which limited powers battle against one another for life or death. If, however, neither the one thing nor the other is meant, then our present experience of the world cannot give us any picture of what will happen. We "see in a mirror dimly" (1 Cor. XIII.12). We can say what that new Thing that God creates is not. But we cannot say what it is. Not only must we believe without seeing but also without being able to imagine what we believe.

We certainly do see the negative fact: if God is to be everything to everyone then the polar tension between "I" and "thou" of which we spoke in *God Transcendent* must cease. "I" or "thou" – either thou art there for me or I am there for thee – this unsolved either-or relationship can no longer exist.<sup>2</sup> This unsolved relationship is the reason why we can be closest only to ourselves. This relation makes it impossible for me to see into thee and for thee to see into me. This causes all the misunderstandings which arise between us. When God is all in all then this unsolved tension must cease. And yet this must not be effected by a combination of the "small I's" into one "great

<sup>2</sup> *Glaube und Denken*, pp. 160ff (167ff).



I" so that all individual distinctions fall away, as the Eastern religions of deliverance teach. That would not be a perfecting but a destruction of creation. But what kind of new state this will be in which all our mutual relationships will be changed, that surpasses all our notions and our power of imagination. We can make no positive statements about it.

The same applies to another relation characteristic of our present existence, viz. motion which continually drives us from the completed past to the undecided future. As we showed in *God Transcendent*,<sup>3</sup> the restlessness of time in motion which never allows us to stop is caused by the fact that a polar relation is the foundation of the progress of time. The past is past only in relation to something else that is as yet future and vice versa. Time therefore cannot come to a stop at a final point. For in order to become past every event needs a new event that is future in relation to the first, and so on *ad infinitum*. In this way our life is a pilgrimage, a "being swept away" (Ps. xc.5), a "having to go" (Ps. xc.7; "being overwhelmed", R.S.V.), an "ever anticipating of oneself" (Heidegger). "We have been granted that we should not rest at any place" (Hölderlin). We cannot say to any moment: "Stay, thou art so beautiful!" If God is to be all in all then this whole pilgrimage is a pilgrimage to God. All things come to rest in Him. The polarity of the movement of time ceases in Him. "For we who have believed enter that rest" (Heb. iv.3). But this rest of the perfected state cannot be the rest of the point of indifference. Consequently it is not the destruction of the time-form but its fulfilment, not the rest of death but fullness of life, not submersion in passivity but the highest activity. But if we should attempt somehow to imagine this fulfilment of time, this discharge of the current of time into the ocean of eternity, then here too we should find that our thought has reached the limit beyond which all speculation is meaningless.

We therefore find that all thoughts which we can have concerning God's new creation lead to faith without our being able to see or to imagine. The ultimate goal to which we and the whole world are moving is as yet concealed from our eyes. We shall see in the final chapter how important this is for our present situation, to what extent we are dependent on guidance

<sup>3</sup> *God Transcendent* (pp. 50-76); cf. *Jesus der Herr*, pp. 18-20 (9-11).

on this account. Before however we direct our attention to this final chapter we shall briefly ask one more question which has occupied the Church at all times. If the world is heading for a state of perfection, will all people take part in it? Or are some excluded? Many thinkers of the Church like Origen, Zinzen-dorf, Oetinger, Bengel, and Jung-Stilling, believed that they could answer this question by referring to passages in Scripture which ring a universal note and include all mankind in the coming salvation. God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim. II.4). "God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom. XI.32). "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. xv.22). On account of those words it has been said that it contradicts both the almighty power and the love of God if eventually His will is not triumphant over all men. But we have no right in this difficult question to postulate something from the thoughts which we ourselves have concerning the essence of God. We can only refer to the intimations which Christ Himself, according to the report of the Gospels, made on this point. And these intimations rather point in the opposite direction. We think first of all of Jesus' sermon on the scandals, where three times over the argument is concluded by "Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mk. ix.42-50). But the interpretation of this passage is disputed. Bornhäuser, for example, says: This can only mean that the corpse is completely destroyed. "The fire is not quenched until even the bones have been destroyed."<sup>4</sup> But even if we disregard this text we shall yet have to take notice of the word that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees on blasphemy against the Spirit: "Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Mt. XII.32). Jn. III.36 gives a corresponding saying: "He who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." It is also in the same line when Jesus said of Judas who betrayed Him: "It would be better for that man if he had not been born" (Mt. XXVI.24). An echo of this serious word of Jesus is heard in the first Epistle of John (1 Jn. v.16): "There is a sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that." That is to

<sup>4</sup> Karl Bornhäuser, *Die Gebeine der Toten, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, VOL. XXVI, No. 3, Gütersloh 1921, p. 13.



say, there are cases in which even intercessory prayer appears to be useless.<sup>5</sup>

If we consult our conscience then it cannot help endorsing these words of Jesus. For as often as we are faced with a decision for or against sin our conscience tells us quite clearly that in this decision for or against God's commandment everything is at stake; not only a temporal destiny depends on whether I break with sin or continue to adhere to it, but an eternity is at stake. Everyone who has been seized by Christ and has experienced the power of the atonement realises only after his salvation in what terrible danger he has been. Like the horseman after riding across Lake Constance he realises that he has passed over an unfathomable abyss into which he would have fallen if a miracle had not saved him. This unfathomable abyss from which I have been saved by Christ cannot be a mere passing separation from God which would at some time have ceased in any case. On the contrary an eternal destiny is at stake.

This does not mean that there could not be a restoration of all things and a salvation of all men. So much only is clear, that the words of Jesus and the experience of our own conscience do not allow us to count on this possibility with any certainty. Christ always simultaneously shows us the other terrible possibility. If eventually God will have mercy upon all then this can only be a pure act of His sovereign grace. We cannot say that it is a conclusion from God's omnipotence and love. For the logical conclusion from God's sanctity and our guilt could only be that we should all perish. We have deserved eternal damnation. It always remains incomprehensible if we are saved. It may therefore be a sacred ordinance of God that all the days of our earthly life we are to remain in a trembling uncertainty regarding this final question. Jesus, who is the only One who can give us guidance concerning this question too, does not lift the veil. We have to resign ourselves to the fact that we are left in the dark respecting this point.

<sup>5</sup> The reference is, of course, not to the "mortal sins" of medieval theology. Tr.

PART FOUR  
THE CHURCH OF CHRIST



## CHAPTER 23

### *The Condition of the World in which the Church Comes Into Being*

ONLY NOW, after we have spoken not only of the atonement but also of the perfecting of the world, can we direct our attention to the question which is of the utmost importance in the present time: what, according to the New Testament, is the essence of the Church of Christ? According to what we have been saying, the Church came into being only because between the atonement and the perfecting of the world there is an interval in which the anti-godly power though robbed of its claim has not yet lost its strength. If this intermediate stage had not occurred, if, as one would have expected, the perfecting of the world had come at once together with the atonement, then there would be no Church distinguished from the world and defenceless in the midst of earthly powers. Then there would be only two conditions of the world, viz. (1) the world as thoroughly ruled by the anti-godly power, and (2) the changed world purified of all demoniacal influences. There is a Church only because beside these two conditions there is also a third, viz. that intermediate condition in which the opposing force has lost its claim but not yet its power over the world.

This gives us the first and most important starting point for an understanding of what the Church of Christ is. We cannot understand the essence of the Church if we regard only the human community that was born at the event of Pentecost in Jerusalem and that is so vividly described in the Acts of the Apostles. On the contrary what the Church is can become clear only if we look carefully not only at this community but at the world as a whole. For the existence of the Church in the midst of the nations is characteristic of the condition of the whole world. The condition of the world in which the Church lives is unsolved and intermediate, and is distinguished from

the two solved conditions. The first solved condition is that in which the anti-godly powers have full liberty to come to unhampered development without any counterpoise being present. The second solved condition is that in which all God's enemies will be vanquished and be put "under his feet" (1 Cor. xv.25), so that God will be everything to everyone. According to the Epistle to the Hebrews the unsolved condition shows itself in that those people "of whom the world was not worthy", that is to say who in inner value are vastly superior to the world, perish "destitute, afflicted, ill-treated" (Heb. xi.37-8). They are abandoned to the powers hostile to God while God as yet holds back his wrath against those powers. This unsolved intermediate state can only make sense if it has the meaning which an unsolved dissonance has in a piece of music. This dissonance would be musically unbearable if it were the last note of the whole piece of music, that is to say if it had a final character. The dissonance can be musically inevitable only as a preparation for the harmonic solution. It has the aim of intensifying the suspense which eventually is resolved in the chord.

Consequently there has never been a real Church which was interested only in its own existence. From the very beginning the Church appeared with a faith that embraced the whole world, with a glowing love for the entire world and with an eye for world history as a whole. Her whole existence from the very beginning has been turned towards the solution of the world dissonance, that is to say towards the conquest of the world not by the Church but by God. That was what Jesus meant when He said to His disciples: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. v.5), and what Paul meant when he said in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. viii.32): "Will he not also give us all things with him?" This universal claim of the Church has at all times rightly disturbed the world and aroused its resistance. For the Church exists only if there are people who take God's future victory over all the resisting forces of the world into account just as seriously and as naturally as a farmer who has sown his winter wheat expects the coming spring or watchers in the night expect the coming dawn. There are only two attitudes to be adopted towards this worldwide expectation of the Church. Either we



can regard it as a great delusion which has spread like an epidemic, in which case everything must be done to stamp out this disease that threatens whole nations. Or the world-wide claim of the Church is founded on truth. Then the existence of this small Church is more important from the point of view of Eternity than all the power of all the empires of the world taken together. This Church, as Jesus said in the parable, is the tiny mustard seed which at present falls to the earth and dies but from which a tree will grow which will overshadow the whole world. It would be much easier for us if we could avoid this strict either-or, if the New Testament's belief concerning the end were merely a dialectical relation between time and eternity that would not disturb the course of the world's development because it was always present. Then any conflicts with the powers of this world could *a priori* be avoided, faith would be purely an inward matter which would not disturb the sphere of world politics. But we cannot escape from the strict either-or with which the New Testament confronts us. For if the Church eliminates the offence which she must cause the world then she has lost her seasoning power in relation to the world.

Merezhkovsky says of the New Testament: "The world, as it now is, and the Book cannot continue together. One of two things: either the world must become other than it is, or the Book must disappear from the world. The world swallowed it as a healthy man may swallow a poison or a sick man medicine and then struggle to assimilate it or to cast it out for ever. It has been struggling for twenty centuries; for the last three the struggle has been obvious even to the blind: they cannot co-exist, either this world or that Book must be destroyed."<sup>1</sup> The same thing must be said of the Church which makes this universal claim: either the Church or the world must perish.

If the existence of the Church stands or falls with the coming ultimate victory of God over the whole world, then to belong to the Church is, humanly speaking, a bold enterprise. For the Church is a house that is entirely built on the invisible foundation of an event that wholly belongs to the future. It has not yet come, it is still coming; no man can guarantee that it will

<sup>1</sup> D. S. Merezhkovsky, *Jesus the Unknown*, trans. H. C. Matheson, London 1933, pp. 19-20.

really come. For only what has happened is definite and unalterable. The coming or not coming of what is yet in the future is still contested. The Church therefore rests, humanly speaking, entirely on an event that is still expected. She has all her eggs in one basket. She accepts all the consequences of this risk. She continually reaches beyond the present toward a great future. She hangs over the abyss of conflicting possibilities. Paul, who staked his whole life for this future, speaks quite openly in one passage of the terrible possibility that the whole expectation might be a delusion. He says: "If Christ has not been raised, . . . if in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Cor. xv. 17, 19; R.S.V. note). The existence of the Church therefore consists in hanging over the abyss of this opposite possibility which humanly speaking is ever present.

But this hanging over the bottomless abyss is no hazard, no adventure, no playing at *va banque*. For if the expectation of the coming event which is to solve all things were a hazard it would not have world conquering power. An adventure always means effort. A certain courage is needed before one can take risks. But this is a limited power of the soul which now rises, now sinks. Even a man of utmost vitality who is equipped with strong energies of the soul can be thrown off his stride if the disappointment which he is to experience is too discouraging, as the strongest swimmer is tossed back if the breakers with which he has to battle are too strong. The Church which lives by the expectation of the end can only have power to conquer the world and be independent of the wavering of her own vitality if the certitude concerning the future on which she has built her existence has nothing to do with a hazard, that is to say if it is not something that can only be managed by the use of energies of the soul. The hope by which she lives must be an effortless repose which does not require any effort. Only if the certitude itself is not a human exertion can it be invincible and not be overcome by any power in the world. The Church therefore must be maintained and supported above the abyss of the opposite possibility by a power which she herself cannot produce. What kind of power this is which supports the Church cannot be discussed until later.

Here we must make only this one point clear: only if the



Church counts in quiet certitude and without any psychological excitement on the coming of the Kingdom of God "in power" as an event that is at hand can she bear the present condition of the world without going to pieces on account of it. If on the one hand everyone in the whole world longs for lasting peace and yet on the other hand machinery is working day and night to make instruments of murder which kill even more rapidly and cruelly than was the case in the last war, in which for example in Hamburg seventy-five thousand people were killed during one night raid, then we can only either despair of the meaning of existence or we must say that a condition of the world in which these things are possible can only be borne as an intermediate stage, as a gateway to something else that follows and in which the meaning of these incomprehensible events finds fulfilment. Only if we can fix our eyes firmly on a coming condition of the world in which the shrill dissonances are resolved can we find an attitude to what is happening in the world now. We can then rank it as part of something greater. We can say that all this can happen without being checked only because the Power which leads this world to an ultimate goal as yet restrains itself for certain reasons and waits for a future moment when its power will be let loose. It can, for example, happen in a maritime war that the admiral allows the enemy fleet to enter a narrow channel while heavy coastal batteries on both sides are ready to fight. No light flares up on the coast, no shot is fired, and the enemy thinks he is master of the situation. But this is a delusion. The officer in command has noticed every movement of the enemy's fleet and keeps back his power only for very definite strategic reasons. Maybe he wants to wait for the moment when the ships of the enemy offer a particularly good target; or maybe he wants to trap the enemy so that he can be attacked from all sides at once and cannot escape. Not until that moment comes will he give the signal at which the roaring of all the cannons will start all at once. Until that moment there is a sinister silence. One can compare the whole of world history with this silence before the crushing attack, when the great final settlement of God with the world is impending. If therefore we are certain of the coming perfecting of the world then we cannot be brought to despair by the fact that all those terrible things are happening

without God interfering, indeed that the Church is to a great extent destroyed without God putting a stop to it. At all times the question which makes us wonder can only be, what strategic reasons God may have for restraining His power so long, that is to say we are kept waiting for the moment when He gives the command for the final attack.

All the questions and pains and temptations which weigh on faith in God, all the riddles of theodicy which have engaged philosophers and theologians, have always arisen from this restraint of God's power in respect of the powers of darkness. Certainly we can only experience the full weight of the enigma contained in God's restraint if we are certain of the fundamental assumptions on which our argument has so far been built. We have seen that the solution of all vital questions is found in communion with God. If communion with God is disturbed by guilt then the impotence, unbledness and distortion of creation arises. When it is restored then strength, blessedness and glory come into being. Only because faith in God cannot live without this conviction must it be shaken to its very depths if the pious man goes through life in weakness and misery while the ungodly prosper.

That this is experienced as a difficult riddle and a disturbance of the normal state of affairs is not merely a Jewish idea but is characteristic of every genuine faith in God. But certainly the contrast between Jewish thought and the attitude of the New Testament which leads beyond Judaism arises from this question. This contrast becomes apparent at the moment when the prodigious thing happens that is told in the Gospels: He who comes into the world in the name of God refrains from proving Himself as God's ambassador by a display of power before all the world. He refrains from spectacular miracles as reported in the Old Testament in connexion with Moses and Elijah. He refrains from acts of power which would be capable of forcing all His enemies to bend their knees before Him and to acknowledge His mission. Where He does not meet the flaring flame of faith He performs no miracle. He disappoints the Pharisees and Scribes who demand that He shall do a sign. "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Mt. xvi.4). The miracles which He does perform are no experimental demonstrations of God's



power. They can be really seen only by faith. And hence His is not a climb to splendour and fame but a descent in which step by step He goes down even to loneliness and the death on the Cross without this defeat before the world being succeeded by His hotly desired rehabilitation and vindication before His enemies. This absence of a display of divine power precisely at the critical point is simply unbearable to Jewish thought. For Jewish faith in God as yet does not know of a perfecting of the world beyond all temporal existence. If therefore God's power does not powerfully enforce itself within this age then it remains unfulfilled altogether. That is why to the Jews the crucified Messenger of God is the great scandal, the religious cause of offence on which faith in God breaks. He who ends his life on the accursed tree cannot be blessed by God, He must be under God's curse. But that on which Jewish faith breaks is precisely where the New Testament faith begins. This is what gives the New Testament Church her new fundamental attitude. The Spirit of God gives her the insight that had been out of reach to the Old Testament. "The weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1.24). For this restraint of God's display of power embodies the highest strength. The Almighty alone can do this. For He has such complete control of the world that He can lead it to a solution and glorious consummation through this most terrible tension without His world government being shattered. What men regard as foolishness is precisely the most profound divine wisdom, the ultimate mystery of the divine plan with the world. But, as the apostle says, only those who love God and to whom He himself has disclosed His mystery realise this.

For why God acts like this is something that our reflexion cannot grasp. So long as we have to depend on our own attempts at explanation our faith must shatter on this stumbling block. The faith of men like Dwinger went to pieces under the impact of the experiences of the first World War.<sup>2</sup> God Himself alone can disclose His mystery to us. We can understand it only if we go by the hints which the New Testament gives. The first reply which we are given to this question is what we read in the second Epistle of Peter (II Pet. III.9): "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus der Herr*, p. 201 (106).

toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The continued prolongation of the intermediate condition therefore is no weakness on God's part but a means of grace in order to make room for the conversion of as many people as possible. Why does this make it necessary for God to restrain His power so long? Only those men can be saved who like Luther in the monastery have only one question weighing on their mind to the exclusion of all others. How can I make sure of God's grace? How can I acquire a reconciled conscience? This question must be so important to us that any questions of power and happiness and honour become completely irrelevant beside this one burning question. Only people who hunger and thirst for righteousness can find the way back to the Father's house. But this is only possible if God to start with offers us atonement and as yet nothing else, as yet no deliverance from impotence, suffering and death. When the second great act of power comes, the judgment and the change in the world, then the gate of the Father's house will be locked and the judgment of the world will begin. The longer this great moment is delayed, the longer the state of tension lasts, the more room there is for souls to repent and be saved. But the pressure under which they live in this intervening time is for those who have already found the way to God the great test by which their faith is steeled. It is the fire by which the gold of faith is tested and purified (1 Pet. 1.7).

A second reason, according to the New Testament, for the delay in the seizure of power is that the rebellion against God must reach its most extreme form before God settles with it. We know from the experience we have with sins committed in dealing with one another that the spell of guilt cannot be broken so long as the guilt remains hidden. The act must first be brought to light in all its fearfulness by an unreserved confession. Only then can there be forgiveness. What is true of the offences which disturb our mutual relationships holds good in a far deeper and more comprehensive sense of the rebellion of the satanic power against God. This rebellion already exists in its entire inexcusability when it is still only a dark impulse and hidden diabolical plan. But if the conflict of which it is the cause is to be solved, then the hidden will must come into the full light of visibility and receive an objective form. It is



part of this process that the satanic will is concentrated in an anti-godly world-power. Satan must have an opportunity of showing his true character as a murderer and liar from the beginning. The fanatical rage of destruction against all that is called God or object of worship (II Thess. II.4) must burst into destructive action. The final revelation of God therefore must be preceded by a revelation of the satanic with all its demonry. Not until then can the unbearable tension be resolved.

The enigmatic fact that God gives the demoniacal opposing power free play has by all this, of course, been only provisionally explained. The riddle has not been really solved. For if it had been solved then the pressure under which the world is to be during this time of purging and decision would cease. The incomprehensibility of the divine restraint of power, which seems to increase and intensify with every new century, is part of this pressure.

## CHAPTER 24

### *The Church as the Body of Christ*

EVEN IF we have realised the full incomprehensibility of the interval between the atonement and the perfecting of the world this does not necessarily mean that we have understood the essence of the Church. We have thereby only realised the condition of the world in which the birth of the Church could occur. This condition by itself cannot produce the Church. It would only imply two possibilities. Either we could wait for God in perplexed suspense and hope for a solution, or we could give up waiting for God and despair of Him. How does the third possibility arise which is realised by the existence of the Church? For the Church to come into being there must be something more than the unsolved tension of the intermediate condition, something that though it does not solve the tension yet fundamentally changes our position in relation to the unsolved tension. The event through which the Church comes into being is the Resurrection of Christ, that is to say the Redeemer's accession to the throne as yet concealed from the world which took place immediately after His death on the Cross. This could not be delayed. For unlike ourselves the Son had never fallen away from communion with the Father. He had to receive power, blessedness and glory without delay. For according to the Biblical vision these are the immediate fruits of communion with God like flowers and fruits of a tree. We others have all left the house of God the Father. We therefore are not entitled to the state of glory into which the Son has entered. We can receive it only as a gift. Whether this is to happen and when does not depend on us. If therefore the execution of God's plan of salvation was to be interrupted at one point then this interruption could only occur at this one point between the perfecting of the Son which ensued immediately after His death and our perfecting, of which we cannot dispose because we are not entitled to it.



We have thereby found the foundation on which the House of the Church is built. The Church comes into being because of the existence of two facts which have to find a relation to one another. (1) We are still in the intermediate stage between the atonement and the consummation, that is to say in an unsolved tension. (2) Christ, however, our Redeemer has already been perfected. He has death and the whole mortal form of the world behind Him. Consequently He lives outside the tension in which we live. This seems to entail that He and we live on two different levels between which no relation can be established. He is in the other world, we are still battling in this world until He returns and accepts us into His Father's Kingdom. If we come to this conclusion then we have not yet realised what it means that He is already perfected. For it is part of the perfected state that He is already superior to the limitations of space and time. For in the incomplete state in which we still dwell the existential form of space and time is the worst obstacle to the deployment of our power. In order to gain unlimited power over reality we should have to be able to make our personal impact felt in an infinite number of places. That is why today we simply have to attempt to conquer space and to eliminate the obstructing distance by radio and other technical means. But we manage this only to a very limited extent. Christ however already is in the supra-polar state of perfection. He is, as the apostles say in figurative speech, at the right hand of God, that is to say in the place where He is immediately close to us everywhere, closer than we are to ourselves. He shares in the divine omnipresence. If this is the case, then it is true that it is impossible for us to reach Him. For we still live in the time-spatial form of the world. We cannot get at Him by means of a mystical leaping across our limitations. But He has the power to be with us whenever and wherever He chooses. The contrast of the two spheres of which we spoke therefore cannot separate Him from us.

We now understand why the Church had to come into being on account of Christ's accession to the throne. The Church does not come into being because some people organise themselves in a philosophical or religious society, nor because people agree on some common creed or promise to live according to some moral law. On the contrary the birth of the Church from

the beginning to the end is entirely an act of the historical Christ who as the Perfected One continues to act and carries on His life's work with supra-spatial and supra-temporal power. For the moment it is irrelevant whether the Church is called His body, or His bride, or the fold which belongs to Him and whose Shepherd He is, or the fellowship of the Table which He gathers around Himself. The decisive point at all events is that the existence of the Church is nothing other than the perfected Christ as the One who acts in history. "Christ is the *ecclesia*."<sup>1</sup>

If the Church is nothing other than Christ in action, then it follows that the Church does not necessarily come into being whenever there is belief in God. When people believe, like the mystical Idealists, in an absolute power to which all men have immediate access and towards whom they receive an absolute obligation, no Church comes into being. Belief in the immediate access of every man to God can only give rise to organisations which aim at exercising and developing men's natural religious endowments. Accordingly neither southern nor northern Buddhism has produced anything in the nature of a church. Only orders of monks and monastic settlements have ever grown on this soil, that is to say training-grounds where men congregate to get religious education. Only if we realise the difficult truth that access to the ultimate Reality by which we live is a far more difficult and serious matter than cheerfully optimistic Rationalists and mystical Idealists thought, is there at least a negative condition for the birth of the Church. We see that access to the ultimate source of power is not immediately open to us. If we were capable of living and acting by an uninterrupted communion with God then our lives would be bound to look quite different. Then we should no longer be subject to that deep uncertainty and painful perplexity which we continually feel in respect of our daily decisions, and we should gladly welcome any destiny that awaits us, even a painful death. Then our will would be entirely united with God's will and we should accept all things immediately from His hands. Only after difficult experiences have matured within us the knowledge that we are not in immediate

<sup>1</sup> Karl Ludwig Schmidt in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament* ed. Kittel, vol. III, p. 509.



contact with God is it no longer sufficient for us to organise ourselves in an Order in which we train and form our general human religious talents. Then the question arises how the spell of our farness from God can be lifted, how the closed door of the Father's house can be opened to us again. The Church is born from this question.

Her essence can be made clear to us most quickly if we start from a fact to which Albert Schweitzer has drawn attention: Paul, who is probably the clearest and most consistent thinker on the question, in all his writings, apart from the address on the Areopagus which is an extraordinary case, knows of no being in God for us men during this age.<sup>2</sup> Not until the perfecting of the world will God be all in all. Then the age of immediate relationship to God begins. Farness from God with all its consequences will cease. God will be in His creatures, and we, His creatures, will be in God, live by God and rest in God. Until then there is an impassable distance between God and us which we notice during every prayer even if we pray with a reconciled conscience.

It now becomes understandable what it means if the Church of Christ comes into being in this intervening time. During the time between the atonement and the perfecting of the world only one Man is already in the state of perfection to which eventually the whole creation will come. One Man alone has an immediate relationship to God. That is the Son who never fell away from communion with God. But in virtue of the existence of the Son we too have an opportunity of participating in the state of perfection even during the present age. How can this be achieved? We must reply that it can happen only if something that at first sight seems to us completely incomprehensible and fantastic is in fact possible. We can participate in the state of perfection if we become part of the person of Christ. For among all persons Christ is the only One who is now in immediate fellowship with God. If we are to be adopted as sons then this is only possible in one way, viz. by being assumed, so to speak, into Him and becoming part of His personality. We can illustrate this by a very simple parable

<sup>2</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen 1930, pp. 5, 10; Engl. trans. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* by W. Montgomery, London 1931, pp. 5, 6, 10.

To the passengers of an ocean steamer the ship is the only body on the vast sea which they are crossing that can keep them permanently afloat. Outside the ship they will sink. So long therefore as they are at sea those men can only keep afloat by being in the ship, that is to say by being part of the floating body of the ship and sharing in every movement of this body. As the ship has the power not to sink, the perfected Christ has the power to remain in God and not to fall into the abyss of farness from God. We do not have this power. Consequently we can only stay afloat during our journey through this age by becoming part of His person so that naturally we entirely move together with Him.

Here, however, we object that a person cannot become part of another person. Persons can only confront one another in an "I-thou" relationship. If this relationship ceases then they are no longer two persons but one. This objection would be justified if the perfected Christ of whom we are speaking existed on the level of the polar world. Within the latter there are only two possibilities: either two persons who are in an "I-thou" relationship, or only one. But the living Lord in whom the Church believes is beyond the unsolved tension of the polar "I-thou" relationship. His relationship to us is subject to other laws which we cannot compare to our personal relationships. The only thing that we could use for a comparison is the state of possession which occurs in connexion with the diabolical rebellion which Jesus has come in the world to conquer. The diabolical power, as we have seen before, meets God on the supra-polar level. Within this rebellion against God also, therefore, something is possible which is not possible between human persons. A man possessed by the devil does not lose his individual existence, and yet at the same time in some incomprehensible manner he becomes part of the satanic ego that speaks through him, cries out through him and acts through him as an instrument. That is the satanic reverse of what Christ can do who has come "to destroy the works of the devil". Therefore Paul can summarise his mysterious twofold relationship to Christ as a member of the Church in the paradoxical words: "I live (i.e. I have my own life – the R.S.V. omits these words), but it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. II. 20).



Only in this light do the most profound and strange words of the New Testament which at first sight appear incomprehensible become understandable. Those are the words in which in the form of varied figures of speech again and again the fact is emphasised that the members of the Church are not adherents or pupils or disciples of Christ but, as Albert Schweitzer expressed it, part of the extended personality of Christ. This is sometimes expressed in a term of locality: we are "in Christ". "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation" (II Cor. v.17). We are "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. vi.11). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii.1). "In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. iii.8). Baptism is a being baptised "into Christ Jesus" (*βαπτισθῆναι εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν*) (Rom. vi.3). Reception into the Church therefore is a being assumed into the person of Christ. The "richest and most exhaustive passage"<sup>3</sup> is perhaps I Thess. ii.14, where Paul speaks of "the Churches of God in Judea in Christ Jesus" ("the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea", R.S.V.). In all these passages we find a simple local "in one another" of Christ and the members of His Church. In other passages the more descriptive figure is used of the body of which the individual members are parts. One might at first think that this metaphor, also used in Roman history by Menenius Agrippa in order to get the striking plebeians to return to the city, describes merely the organic solidarity of the members amongst themselves, not their belonging to Christ. But precisely in the chapter in which this expression is most richly developed (I Cor. xii) the whole exposition begins with a word that is the superscription of what follows: "For just as the body is one, and has many members . . . so it is with Christ" (v. 12). That is to say Christ Himself is the whole body. The members of the Church are members of the body of Christ. To the apostle it is evidently all-important that we as members of the Church should be assumed into the personality of Christ with our innermost being. For in the present age Christ is the only place where an immediate relationship with God is to be found. He is the supra-spatial place where so to speak the steps to heaven are. Only if we stand in

<sup>3</sup> K. L. Schmidt in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament* ed. Kittel, VOL. III, p. 509.

this sacred place, that is to say if we are part of His person, does the long repressed child's cry burst forth again from our soul: "Abba! Father!" (Rom. viii.15).

What Paul expresses by the picture of the human body Christ in the Gospel of John illustrates by a metaphor from plant life when He says: "I am the vine, you are the branches." Just as with Paul not the head but the whole body represents the personality of Christ of which the members of the Church have become part, so in John's Gospel not the stem only but the whole vine is Christ. That is to say the disciples do not merely grow like branches and fruits from Christ the stem. They are in the vine as its component parts. Only if they abide in Him can they bear fruit. "For apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. xv.5).

This whole train of thought of course is entirely incomprehensible to us as long as we think that access to the Father is naturally open to us and that from any point of reality we can rise to God without further ado. If this were true then it would not be necessary to become part of Christ and to abide "in Him" in order to be in contact with God and to bear fruit for eternity.

If we start from this widely held view and then encounter the strange statements of the New Testament according to which we are in Christ and part of the body of Christ, then we can only accept these statements in two ways. One way is to say: to be in Christ is no more than to accept His teaching and to follow His example. But if the apostles had wanted to speak of the simple relationship between a teacher and his disciple, familiar to everyone in antiquity on account of the schools of philosophy, then they would have expressed this simple thing in an equally simple manner and not used such an extraordinary figure of speech. Plato or Xenophon never said that they were "in" their teacher Socrates or that they were members of his body. If this simple explanation will not do, then there is a second possibility: to resort to comparative religion, and to find parallels in the Hellenistic mystery cults. There the myste after a long road of initiations and exercises eventually becomes identified with the deity, so that in the end, according to the description of Apuleius, dressed in divine attire he is worshipped by the congregation. But this parallel does not explain things



either. For no member of the Church in the apostolic age ever said what the fool in Christ says in Gerhart Hauptmann's novel *Emanuel Quint*: "I am Christ." No apostle said: my ego is extinguished; I have merged into one with Christ as a river discharges into the sea and loses its name and its form. This mystical self-extinction as it occurs in the Eastern religions of salvation is far from the early Church. Paul never loses his ego in Christ. He always faces his Lord as a responsible person who will be called to account. "It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. iv.4). If nevertheless the apostle says that he is in Christ then this cannot mean that he has become Christ. A passenger in a ship is not identical with the whole ship. The parts of the body like foot, hand, eye or ear do not lose their identity as parts of the body. They retain their identity but they are parts of the body.

We therefore see that it is impossible to regard the "being in Christ" of which the apostles speak either as following his principles or as mystical identification. The only possible interpretation is the one which we first mentioned. We are here confronted with a unique and characteristic relationship between persons that cannot be compared to any other relationship which may occur in life or may be sought by any mystical religion of salvation. This relationship is only possible if the New Testament is right in its view of the present state of the world and its relation to the coming consummation. Only if we are in the intermediate state while Christ has already been perfected can He be the supra-spatial place where an immediate relationship to God is to be found. In Him the power of sonship of God is concentrated like the power of the sun in a burning-glass to radiate again from there in all directions. The Church consists of people who, without losing their own ego in a mystical intoxication, are members of the body of Christ. Only so do they share in sonship of God.

If this is so then the whole meaning of the Church and the reality of a Christian community today still depends on the one question whether it is really true, as the New Testament says, that Christ after His death still continues to work in the Church, or whether this continued action of Christ is only an illusion which grew in the excited imagination of the disciples after the execution of their Master, and which in the second

century condensed into the myth of a new deity which like the myth of Mithras became the centre of one of the many religious organisations which flourished on the muddy soil of the dying ancient world. There are only these two possibilities between which we today again have to make a decision. And according to how we decide we take our stand on one or the other side in the present ideological battle. We must be fully clear about the either-or with which we are confronted here.

The first possibility is this. The concept of an eternal Christ who after His execution continues to act in history is fantasy and free invention. Jesus' life's work ended with His death, just like other people's. What continues to be active is the heritage of memories which the disciples have preserved for us. If that is so then we can freely dispose of this heritage. We can disregard what we find strange and take whatever we can use for our present aims and needs. Maybe the yield is small and we are inclined to seek for other examples for our present life's battle, examples which appeal to us more because they belong to our own civilisation. Or maybe we find such riches in the heritage of Jesus that we are grateful to Him all the days of our lives and build Him a memorial so that future generations may not forget this great Man who once lived upon earth. But in both cases we are free in respect of what Jesus has left us. We can do with it what we please. At a time when we need all our efforts for building up our nation again there is no sense then in allowing the existence of Churches in whose worship of a dead man only part of the nation can seriously share.

The other possibility is that what the apostles proclaimed at the risk of their lives is actually true, and that after His death Jesus as the present Christ broke through all the limitations of space and time and continues to act with divine authority. If this is true then the situation in which we meet Him is entirely different from what it is in the other case. For then we cannot freely dispose of Him and His heritage. Then we are dealing not with a dead but with a living Man who has divine authority. Then He can only dispose of us.

If Christ is a living Man who is still active then there is no sense in speaking of the ethics of Jesus, which could be summarised in some formula and to which we could adopt an attitude – which we could accept, or reject as something foreign. If we



do this then we have treated Him as if He were dead. For we can only reduce the will and desires of a man to a principle if we have them before us as something that is finished. In regard to someone who is still alive this would be premature. For his life is not yet finished. We are in no position to know whether all that He has done so far is not perhaps only the preparation and prelude to something greater that is still in the future, that we cannot yet comprehend and which therefore we should not yet judge. Maybe the earthly life of Jesus is only the very first beginning of the execution of a plan that takes thousands of years.

If Christ is the living One, then the situation is the same as when during a war a general executes a great military plan in order to force the enemy to surrender. It is irrelevant to the execution of this plan whether the ordinary soldier who is sent in advance of the army has a full understanding of the plan of campaign or whether he is critical of it. For the plan is the general's business. To the ordinary man the only relevant question is whether he is regarded as able-bodied and is enlisted in the army with which the general executes his plan or whether he is declared unfit. Similarly the living Christ as God's authorised representative executes the plan by which the anti-godly power is defeated after long heavy battles. Paul says that "the end" when Christ "delivers the Kingdom to God the Father" cannot come until He has destroyed "every rule and every authority and power" (he means the demoniacal powers which still rule in the world). "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. xv.24-5). The perfected Christ therefore Himself leads the battle which began with His first coming into the world, the tremendous battle in which the Church is defenceless against the demoniacal world power. Christ gives the hostile powers room to vent their rage and to constrain the Church. For only when the rebellion against God has revealed its terribleness to the very limit does it become ripe for the final judgment. But only the Son is let into the secret of this incomprehensible plan of God in which an invisible Leader of battles leads the Church and the powers of the world against each other, until through the great apostasy the Church gains the victory. "No one knows . . . who the Father is except the Son" (Lk. x.22). For He alone is in im-

mediate contact with God and sees into the depths of divine wisdom. The ultimate question for us therefore is not at all what attitude we adopt to Christ and His plan, whether we accept it or criticise it. For we know the plan only in parts. The question which is decisive for our destiny is only what attitude Christ adopts to us, whether He accepts us and enlists us in the crack troops with which He fights His battles or whether He declares us unfit. Christ has no need of us to reach His aim with the human race. He can ignore us. He can declare a whole nation unfit. He has nations in abundance to build His Church. To every nation today He can say what He said to God's people of old: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Mt. xxi.43). Jesus said one day: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt. x.37-8). The question therefore is not whether we value Christ, whether He conforms to our standard of honour or not. The only question is whether we are worthy of Him or whether He has to reject us as unfit because we do not conform to the high standards which He must require if we are to be enlisted in his crack troops. The highest honour which can be bestowed on a man is to be worthy of Him, that is to be deemed fit to carry his cross behind Him and under His guidance to lose his life in the decisive battle of world history.



## CHAPTER 25

### *Admission into the Church*

THIS LEADS US to a clear reply to the question what the decisive event is which brings the Church into being. So far we had only seen that the Church is the work of the perfected Christ who makes men parts of His person. But only now does it become clear what kind of act of Christ this is by which the Church is brought into being. It is the sovereign act by which He incorporates men into Himself and makes them into instruments through which He can work. This adoption by Christ is all-important. It determines our destiny in the same way as the destiny of a soldier is determined by his enlistment. All that happens to him afterwards is implied in this. At the beginning of the first three Gospels, where we are told the story of the enrolment of the nearest circle out of which the world-wide Church of Christ has grown, the new and characteristic point is that Jesus indeed, just like the prophets of old, summoned people to keep God's commandments which they knew very well. The first answer to the question "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is: "Keep the commandments" (Mk. x.17-19). By the call to repentance with which Jesus travelled through the country He wanted to summon His people to repent in view of the coming Kingdom of God and again to keep God's old commandments. But this was merely the first step on the road to the fulfilment of His mission. It was followed by a second step by which He went far beyond all the law-givers and prophets of the past. This second step was a summons which drew the attention away from all the given commandments of God known of old to His own person. It was the summons by which He took certain people into His immediate retinue: "Follow me!" Jesus looked with love on the rich young man who sincerely declared that he had faithfully kept all God's commandments, and told him: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give it to the poor . . .

and come, follow me" by taking up the cross (Mk. x.21).

When Jesus calls men personally to follow Him, when for example He calls Levi from the tax office or Simon and Andrew from the fishing boats, this is not done in the form of a pastoral talk in which He discusses objections and proffers reasons in order to bring people to a responsible decision. On the contrary every time they are chosen by a dictatorial command which implies His full divine authority to bind people to Himself for all eternity with magnetic power. This command to follow Him is like a knighting ceremony by which a man is accepted into a fellowship of arms. A man who at this command has entered into the fiery circle of His leadership has to do two things. He must "leave everything and follow Him". For him all other obligations are abolished, even family duties; and he must be prepared in every respect to share his Master's fate. For a servant is not above his master (Mt. x.24). The disciple must be prepared to drink the same cup as the Master, and to be baptised with the same baptism with which He is baptised (Mk. x.35-6). Like the men condemned to death who could so often be seen passing through the gates of Jerusalem he must take up his cross on his shoulder and step by step walk behind the Master and follow in His steps. He must never be ashamed of Him or His words (Mk. viii.38); he must love no one more than Him, not even his father and his mother (Mt. x.37).

According to the three first Gospels, therefore, the goal at which Jesus aims is to call out of the human race a community that bears His image. As a sculptor carves a work of art out of a piece of marble by cutting out all that does not go with the sculpture, Christ calls out of the raw material of the simple unformed people around Him a group of men whom He can make into instruments of the work that the Father has given Him. This is the new family fellowship which is more closely knit together than any ties of blood. Jesus once looked round the circle of His chosen disciples and said: "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk. iii.34). But in the Gospel of John the creation of this elected community is the central theme to an even larger extent than in the three first Gospels. Christ needs this Church in order to complete the work for the fulfilment of which the Father has sent Him into



the world. Looking back on His life the parting Christ says in the high-priestly prayer: I have "accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do" (Jn. xvii.4). In order that He should be able to complete this work God has "given" Him people who are in the same relationship to Him as He is to the Father. As the circulation of the blood starts from the heart and ever returns to the heart the current of divine life and action starts from the Father and passes through the Son as through a pure medium. The Son does nothing of his own authority (Jn. v.30). The Father "gives" Him the works which He is to do. "Whatever he (the Father) does, that the Son does likewise" (v. 19). He speaks thus as the Father taught Him (viii.28). As He hears He judges (v. 30). His food is to do the will of Him who sent Him (iv.34). But from the Son the stream of divine life and action is poured out over the Church of those whom the Father has given Him. For this Church is His instrument as He is the Father's instrument. "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (xvii.18). "I have given them the words which thou gavest me" (xvii.8). "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love . . . just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (xv.9-10). The aim of Jesus' earthly life therefore is to extract from the old human race this unique new organism which forms the beginning of the coming perfecting of the world. In this organism the divine current of life is circulating continuously which comes from the Father, passes through the Son and eventually returns to the Father.

The goal at which Jesus aims therefore is not the victory of a philosophy in competition with other philosophies, or a canvassing campaign for a new morality in contrast with other ethical systems. Communion with a living person takes the place of all philosophies and systems of ethics which could be summarised in fixed principles. This life under the continuous guidance of a living person is a much stricter obligation and a far more comprehensive dependence, applying to all the details of life, than any obligation to a philosophy or a national constitution or a party programme could be. Communion with the invisible law is the complete relinquishment of all attempts to guide ourselves. We have once and for all placed our future and all its decisions in the hands of Someone else.

This also means giving up any moral law to which we could be bound once and for all. If a collection of moral principles could have regulated the life of Christ's Church then Christ at His farewell would have left His disciples a collection of rules of conduct or "sacred truths", as Buddha did. But instead of giving a table of such rules for their journey through life, in His farewell discourses He promised them His Spirit. This was to take the place which His bodily presence had occupied so far. He would continue to guide them and "guide you into all the truth" in future as He had so far guided them by His physical presence. The place of all precepts, commandments and orders laid down in writing, which at any event are usually a net with wide meshes, quite easy to slip through because all our everyday decisions allow of many possibilities, is now taken by Someone who is alive and present and to whom we belong.

The tacit assumption is, of course, that we can fulfil our destiny only if our life is in tune with the created order, that is to say with God's will which is at the bottom of the creation of every man and every nation. But with our limited opportunity of observation we can only guess at the ultimate meaning of this fundamental order. Only He who has access to the depths of God's plan from creation to consummation can really reveal to us the meaning of creation in every new situation. The Letter to the Colossians says: "In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1.16-17). That is to say the ultimate meaning of the creation of the whole world is comprised in Christ. He has the destiny of the world in His hands. Through Him alone do we receive the key to an understanding of the creative purpose of the various races and nations. Only when following Him are we guarded against misinterpreting the created order. If we separate the two and place them side by side or in contrast to one another, the created order on the one hand and the message which Christ brings on the other, then we have withdrawn from the guidance of Christ. For this would mean a vote of no confidence in Him. We would then not believe in the authority as Leader which



the Creator of the world has granted Him. We would not realise that we are facing the One who has a deeper insight into the meaning of creation than we can acquire with our limited observation. Only in communion with Him are we made free of all human observances and any moral principles which human authorities want to fix. We become like children and begin to live by the *original* ground of creation, without reflexion.

This does not by any means interfere with the distinction the discovery of which took Luther further than the ideal of medieval civilisation, the distinction between the two realms in which we live, the realm of natural order in which the law prevails and the realm of grace in which there is only voluntary consecration. But if we hold that Jesus has authority only in respect of the forgiveness of sin and that we can comprehend the natural order without Him by our own reason, then we are limiting His authority as Leader. The Christ of whom the Gospels tell us was by no means content with speaking the word of grace to sinners. Again and again He gave those whom He called to follow Him concrete orders and commands by which to fashion their lives. He took the whole of their lives under His leadership.

All this might make us think that the Church comes into being through the conjunction of people who have made the heroic decision to relinquish all self-guidance and like Christopher in the legend "to serve the most powerful Lord". But if the Church came into being through this heroic decision of men, then the decisive question would again be, what attitude we men adopt to Christ. It would then be of decisive importance for the future of the world if, for example, a whole generation turned its back upon Jesus and started an atheist movement. If we so wished we would then be able by our human activities to dislodge Jesus from the world and to interfere with His plans for the world. But, as we saw, the decisive question is precisely not whether we accept or reject Jesus but whether He accepts or rejects us. The question is not whether we grant Him some place in our cultural plan. On the contrary the question is whether He considers us worthy for Him to grant us a place in His plan for the world which He can execute without us. According to the New Testament the position is

therefore that we cannot be admitted to the Church of Christ or be excluded from it by our own decision. The decision is in the hands of Someone higher. We must be "called". "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn. vi.44). Only "those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. viii.30).

Certainly every conversion to Christ takes place by means of a conscious decision of the will which is made as the result of the message of a living witness. But everyone who does reach an inward change will discover afterwards that he made no decision of his own but that a decision was made concerning him from all eternity, that is to say in a supra-temporal fashion. His surrender to Christ depends on a supra-temporal calling which became an act on the temporal level and has its effect on the ethical level in the form of a surrender of our will. We are here confronted with a mystery that we can no longer fathom by our reflexion. For the calling by which we are admitted into the Church has nothing whatsoever to do with compulsion. It is not a dark fate that befalls us, not a destiny belonging to the immanent context of cause and effect. On the contrary, admission by Christ delivers us from all compelling powers and sets us free from all causal connexions. Surrender to God takes place in inner liberty and supreme responsibility. We hasten to fall into the arms of Him to whom we have belonged since we were born, and acknowledge His claim on us acquired at such a high price. And yet everyone who has done this knows that what overcame his resistance was not his own decision. It is beyond the contrast between compulsion and free decision which holds good in the world. It cannot be expressed in the categories of the polar world because it comes from the supra-polar sphere. This is precisely why, as in the New Testament, we can refer to what happens to us and within us when we are converted to Christ only by purely passive expressions, indicating an undeserved reception, something that we do not do but that God does to us. We have made no contribution at all to our admission into the Church. We have been called with divine authority by the invisible Christ to become part of His body.

Everything depends on this tremendous passive voice in



which the New Testament witnesses continually speak. Only because on the decisive point which has given direction to our lives we have in every respect been merely receptive, do we as members of the body of Christ have a driving force against all resistance which the world puts in our way. If we had ventured to follow Christ on account of our own inclination then even our faith in the ultimate victory of God by which the Church lives would be purely an adventure in which, in the face of all that seems to speak against it, we could persevere only at the expense of extreme effort. Only because we have been admitted by Christ into His Church without any contribution of our own is this faith no adventure. We can without effort repose "in Christ". Above the abyss of conflicting possibilities we are supported and held by His invisible power. The Church's belief in the end, therefore, is not the lust of power of a people or the greed of dominion of a human community which has united to push all the others aside. The Church is always concerned about Christ's ultimate victory over the whole earth. The Church, which has been granted this belief in the end, is consequently free from any lust of power of her own, in virtue of her burning love of the whole world for which God has such great plans.

Only because we have not ourselves gathered around Christ but have been accepted by Him is the bond which holds us together unbreakable as well. If we had united as one unites to form a society or a party on a basis of common convictions or traditions then the Church would fall to pieces as soon as some difference of opinion arose or some disagreement on questions of practical life. But because the unity of the Church exists in virtue of our having been admitted by God into communion with Christ, therefore this unity can survive all contrasts. When in the Church in Rome profound differences had arisen in connexion with Jewish laws about food and the sabbath, Paul overcame them simply by saying "Let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him" (Rom. xiv.3). "He . . . who eats, eats in honour of the Lord . . . while he who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord" (v. 6). The invisible Lord for whom all live is the point of union which keeps the Church together even if her members do not understand one another on important

vital questions. The love which binds the members of the Church together for ever as brothers sharing a common destiny is based on the fact that they have been accepted.

Only because we have not united ourselves but have been incorporated in His Church by Him is it no presumption if the Church claims for herself the prerogatives of Christ Himself. According to Mt. xviii Jesus granted the power to forgive sins not only to Peter and his successors, as one might think on account of Mt. xvi, but to the whole Church when He said: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). Binding here means the binding of conscience in respect of a sin, loosing means the setting free of conscience from a sin. This binding and loosing no one can do to another man by his own authority. For no man has power over the conscience of someone else. But on the authority of the perfected Christ it happens again and again that a man burdened by sin is actually set free by the words of one of his brothers and finds peace.

Only because Christ Himself has incorporated the Church into Himself is it no fanatical exaggeration when the Church believes that the guidance of the Holy Spirit which Christ promised the Church of His disciples in His farewell discourses is a fact. It is characteristic of the impotence of the Church during the intermediate time between the atonement and the perfecting of the world that even believers can continually err in their vital decisions. But because Christ Himself has incorporated the Church into Himself, because we ourselves have not gate-crashed into His sphere, He is bound to act in history through the Church as His instrument. It must therefore continually happen that members of the Church who have to speak responsibly experience the fulfilment of His word: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Mt. x.20). In extraordinary circumstances it must be possible that the Church is guided by the Spirit through dangerous situations without sober consideration and simple obedience to the written word being thereby ruled out in any way.

Only because it is the perfected Christ Himself who acts through the Church as His instrument do things occur in the



Church over and over again which cannot be explained by the forces active in this world. To everyone whose eyes have been opened to this these events are announcements of the fullness of power of the perfected creation. This applies, for example, to the answer to prayer which Christ at His farewell promised His disciples if they prayed in his name, and to the miracles of healing which were part of the life of the early Church. These events are not the rule. Even the Church remains under the power of disease and death. For we are still living in the age of the impotence of the Church. But as isolated flashes of lightning announce an approaching thunderstorm so these isolated miraculous events are premonitory signs of the tremendous discharge of power by which God will overcome all the powers of death. The Church experiences these victories over the destructive forces of the world because she is the body of Christ. But Christ is already the perfected One. That is to say He is the only place in the midst of the present reality where creation has already been perfected and the victory over the form of death of this world has been gained. Consequently this place allows of the possibility of deeds of power by which Christ grants His Church a foretaste of His coming victory when He will destroy "the last enemy", death (1 Cor. xv.26).

It has thus become clear on all sides that the birth and preservation of the Church of God in the midst of the nations of this world is not a human enterprise but only and solely the work of the perfected Christ. If we know this, then we have been set free of all anxiety and excitement in the face of the ideological battle that agitates the nation to the very depths. Whether this battle will lead to a time of revival or whether the time of grace for this nation has come to an end and we can expect only a time of judgment, depends solely on what Christ, the invisible Leader of the battles, has in mind for this people. He can direct things in such a way that the severe storm to which we are now exposed shakes the withered autumn leaves off the trees in order to make room for the awakening of a new profound knowledge of Christ. The same thing that happened to the first great persecutor Saul of Tarsus when he tried to destroy the young Church which he regarded as a danger for his people can still happen today to those who passionately fight with all their hearts against Christ. Saul believed he was

dealing with a doctrine or an ideology which could be refuted by reason, or with a sect which would be destroyed as soon as its leading men were under arrest. But suddenly he was confronted by a living Man whose overwhelming presence brought him to his knees – the living One whom no one can escape who once has come under His power. Today this living Lord still says to everyone who attempts to resist His world dominion: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It hurts you to kick against the goads” (Acts ix.5, xxvi.14).

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